MARVEL MASTERWORKS
THE FANTASTIC FOUR
VOLUME 24

THE FANTASTIC FOUR Nos. 258-268,
ALPHA FLIGHT No. 4 & THE THING No. 10
JOHN BYRNE

MARVEL MASTERWORKS

PRESENTS

THE Fantastic Four

VOLUME 24

COLLECTING

THE FANTASTIC FOUR Nos. 258-268,
ALPHA FLIGHT No. 4 & THE THING No. 10

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MARVEL MASTERWORKS
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Fantastic Four created by Stan Lee & Jack Kirby

INTRODUCING THE *NEWEST* MEMBER OF THE *FANTASTIC FOUR!*

OH, MY! IS THE WORLD READY FOR THIS?

MAYBE NOT-- BUT I SURE AM!

MARVEL MASTERWORKS

CONTENTS

Introduction by Michael Higgins. . . . . .

The Fantastic Four #258, September 1983

"Interlude" . . . . . .

The Fantastic Four #259, October 1983

"Choices" . . . . . .

The Fantastic Four #260, November 1983

"When Titans Clash!" . . . . . .

Alpha Flight #4, November 1983

"Resolutions!" . . . . . .

The Fantastic Four #261, December 1983

"The Search for Reed Richards" . . . . . .

The Fantastic Four #262, January 1984

"The Trial of Reed Richards" . . . . . .

The Fantastic Four #263, February 1984

"R. and R." . . . . . .

The Fantastic Four #264, March 1984

"Inferno" . . . . . .

The Thing #10, April 1984

"Marking Time" . . . . . .

The Fantastic Four #265, April 1984

"The House That Reed Built" . . . . . .

The Fantastic Four #266, May 1984

"Call Her…Karisma!" . . . . . .

The Fantastic Four #267, June 1984

"A Small Loss" . . . . . .

The Fantastic Four #268, July 1984

"The Masque of Doom!" . . . . . .

INTRODUCTION
BY MICHAEL HIGGINS

The very first work I ever did for Marvel Comics was background inking on the cover of *Fantastic Four* #194 by George Pérez back in 1977, so I wasn't exactly a starstruck newcomer by the time I became the Assistant Editor on *FF* in 1983. On the other hand, my guest-appearance in the pages of *FF* #262 is definitely one of the proudest and most memorable moments of my entire comics career.

I'd met John Byrne at Marvel-Con '76 held in New York City. I still have the convention booklet, with two sketches John did for me on the inside covers. One of them is the very first drawing of Yellowjacket he ever did. I saw John again later that year at the Creation Convention over Thanksgiving weekend. His first two issues of *Marvel Team-Up* had just been published. John hadn't seen the second issue in print yet. I told John I thought the inker had done a better, more faithful job following his pencils than the inker on the previous issue.

It was hard to imagine I was able to see John's published work before he did, and it was flattering and exciting that he seemed to care about my opinion. One of the only fan letters I ever had published soon followed in *Marvel Team-Up* #68. The idea I wrote in to say that I liked so much was revealed to have been one of John's contributions to the story. Clearly, there was something about John's work and the way that he thought about comics that resonated with me. I guess you might even say I was one of John Byrne's first fans.

Early in 1978, I started working in Marvel's Bullpen and over the next two and a half years I worked on thousands of pages—hundreds of them by John Byrne. Spidey, Thing, FF, Hulk, Avengers and, of course, John's brilliant and justifiably acclaimed run on *The X-Men* in collaboration with Terry Austin and Chris Claremont. I cannot tell you how exciting it was for a teenaged comic fan like me to suddenly be on the inside. I was one of the very first people in the world to see these sensational pieces of art, and I was actually working on those pages each and every month, even if only making minor adjustments. Add a "Magneto, Master of Magnetism" logo here, letter a recap there—that sort of thing. I guess my most "memorable" contribution to *The X-Men* was the splash page top copy that was used beginning with issue #114.

I pasted the lettering onto one of the John Byrne/Terry Austin issues of *X-Men* on Christmas Day 1979! Issue #132. You might consider my state of affairs as being something akin to Bob Cratchit's, but on the flip side I was being paid to spend Christmas Day with an entire issue of Byrne and Austin original artwork. I'm sure there are countless fans out there who would have gladly traded their place for mine.

No longer writing fan mail, I lettered the title to *Marvel Team-Up* #75, noteworthy since it united me with John and inker Al Gordon for the very first time. A few years later, at my suggestion, Al would become John's regular inker on *The Fantastic Four*. And, as fate would have it, I even lettered the title and splash page of *FF* #221, part two of the very first FF story both written and penciled by John. When I worked in the Bullpen, I did quite a bit of work "with" John Byrne.

Only, during the entire time I worked in Marvel's Production Department, I probably saw John once or twice, as he was living hundreds of miles away in Canada. On one of his rare visits to Marvel's office, I was surprised to learn that John not only remembered me, but that he knew me by name… and he told me that Roger Stern, who was not only his editor but also an old friend from John's fan-publishing days, spoke highly of my work. Gotta say I was pretty chuffed.

We got to talking about John's penciling style, and I asked him if it was a conscious decision to base his figure work more on a Neal Adams model than, say, a Jack Kirby model. He told me that it was and I asked him why. He said that when he tried to draw like Jack Kirby it turned out looking like Herb Trimpe. Made enough sense to me. After all, Herb was unquestionably influenced very strongly by the work of Jack Kirby. A few years down the line, Herb would end up penciling the first comic book series I wrote (*G.I. Joe and the Transformers*), and John's work would increasingly tend to show more of the Kirby influence.

I left Marvel's staff late in 1980, only to be rehired as an Assistant Editor shortly before Christmas in 1982. While I wasn't exactly a seasoned veteran by that time, I certainly wasn't the new kid on the block when I was assigned to work on *Fantastic Four* in mid-1983. By the time Assistant Editors' Month rolled around—when each title's Assistant Editor ostensibly took over the book for an issue while the Editors were away at the San Diego Comic Convention—I'd been working on the series for a few issues, but I'd only spoken with John on the phone a handful of times in my new position. I had no idea if John remembered me during those conversations or not.

Rest assured that a creative force like John Byrne had a direction in mind for whatever he was working on, and it was, to say the least, creatively disruptive to routinely be forced to shift gears and suddenly incorporate completely extraneous concepts into his work. Assistant Editors' Month was one of those instances…and so was a certain Secret War that loomed just a little further down the line, but John always responded to these challenges like a pro.

John did not tell me in advance what he had in mind for Assistant Editors' Month, and I wasn't presumptuous enough to think I should be telling John Byrne what to do. Honestly, I was only thinking about doing something on the letters page to satisfy the requirements of the concept. Imagine my surprise when I opened up the package with the original art for *FF* #262…and discovered that the story started with—*me*! There I was, right there on the splash page!

John had never asked for a photo. John had never seen my office…and yet, somehow, John had gotten it exactly right. He captured not only my attitude and personality, but he also got the personality and attitude of my workspace. That doesn't mean I actually had a toy clown hanging over my desk, but the "feel" was absolutely perfect. Nevertheless, I took the liberty of adding a few distinctive touches of my own. For example, John had drawn me wearing a blank T-shirt, so I adjusted it just a bit to more accurately reflect my character.

Incidentally, that note in the corner box on the cover of *FF* #262 is a real note from John. When the cover came in, I wasted no time in grabbing the nearest marker and inking the words in, just as John had penciled them. I should have grabbed a better pen, the line came out a bit too heavy, but there is something appropriate about the choice of that particular marker, as it was the same kind John was inking all of his work with at that time. Later, I remember John telling me that he hadn't penciled any of the aliens that appeared on the cover of *FF* #262. He just went straight to ink. Now that's confidence!

Eventually, when John paid a visit to the office again, he said he had been wondering if I was the same Michael Higgins he used to raise eyebrows with. Raising eyebrows happens to be a characteristic trait we share and frequently employ instead of using words. It was something we used to do back in the convention days. John raised one eyebrow…then the other…and so did I. He knew who I was all right, and I think John was happy to confirm I was indeed me.

It wasn't long before John moved to New York and became much more of a regular presence in Marvel's office. Those were pretty good times for a lot of us. We had a great staff, and most of us

enjoyed working and playing together. Of course, sometimes difficulties arise when people who aren't artists try to tell people who are artists how to be artists. John certainly had to deal with some of that, but to his credit, John just kept doing what he did how he did it.

Since John almost always plotted, scripted, penciled and inked his work himself, there was no reason to strictly follow the production schedules that were dictated from above. I've seen John say that he never missed a deadline, but that would depend on whose deadline and how it was defined. Technically John missed a lot of in-house deadlines. While this may have exasperated Traffic Manager Virginia Romita, none of John's books ever missed a shipping date—that's the one that really mattered—and none of them ever needed fill-ins by other creators. John was, without a doubt, a force to be reckoned with.

So, then, you may ask, why is there an issue in this collection penciled by somebody else? I wondered the same thing back in 1983, but the Powers That Be insisted we had to have an emergency fill-in in the drawer in case something happened to the regular "team." Paradoxically, those same Powers always wanted us to publish stories we had in inventory so we didn't end up having them in the drawer anyway. John was ultimately the one who decided to slot the inventory issue penciled by Kerry Gammil as *FF* #266. This was John's version of a fill-in issue by someone else. In addition to plotting, scripting and inking the issue, John also provided the plot, script, pencils and inks for the framing sequence that was added to fit the story into continuity. As I said, a force to be reckoned with.

Routinely, the only thing that wasn't done by the time John turned in his pages was the coloring and the lettering, although sometimes John even inked in balloon shapes, with copy indicated in pencil. It was a normal part of the process for coloring to be done as the last step, but it was not standard practice for lettering to be done at the last minute. Frequently, the letterer regularly assigned to *FF* would turn down the job due to the difficulty of meeting such a tight deadline. What did we do in a case like that? Well, my boss sort of had a secret weapon, meaning he would reassign the lettering to me.

So after spending the whole day working as assistant editor on an entire line of comics, I would go home and spend the whole night lettering pages. I would letter the first half of the book one night and the second half the next, and that's exactly what happened with three of the issues you find in this collection. I had to letter one of them so fast that it is the only issue of any comic I ever hand-lettered on original art without ruling guidelines for the copy. There wasn't enough time, so I worked on a light box, taping a clear acetate with ruled lines under each art board as I lettered it. I certainly wasn't getting much sleep back in those days.

Another real powerhouse on our team was a fine gentleman named Ron Wilson, penciler on the Thing's regular monthly title, which John plotted and scripted. Ron had the body of a prize fighter and heart and soul of a teddy bear. He was a truly lovable guy. Around this time, John also managed to script Ron's *Super Boxers* graphic novel, which I'm sure no one will be surprised to learn I was also assistant editor and letterer on. Man, we were sure doing an awful lot of work together!

As we near the end of this *Marvel Masterworks* collection, we find ourselves on the precipice of war—*Secret Wars*—which among other things would signal the departure of the Thing from the pages of *Fantastic Four*…and the introduction of the She-Hulk, who suddenly replaced him as a regular member of the team. To be honest, She-Hulk was not one of my favorite characters, even though a few years earlier I was the regular letterer of her short-lived title.

I wondered what in the world John was thinking…but, truthfully, with *The Thing* #10 and *FF* #265, John was once again rising to the occasion, facing head-on the challenges presented by the decree that both series tie in with a story spread across Marvel's entire line, intended to promote the *Secret Wars* title—but no work had yet been done on the *Secret Wars* title to suggest any sort of guideline. But big changes were promised, and this was the big change that John decided on as the War was just about to begin—or, waitaminnit—had it already ended? It all depends on how you look at it.

I wish I could say that I contributed in any major way to any of these stories, but I didn't. Frankly, nobody did except John Byrne. We only knew what John was planning in a fairly general way. I suspect even he didn't know all the details of what would happen till he was actually drawing the pages.

John knew well the restrictions of mainstream comics, yet I think it is safe to say that he was pushing the envelope as far as it would go back in the 1980s. In an issue of *Alpha Flight* published just a few short months after the crossover contained in this collection, and which I also happened to letter, John introduced one of the first gay super hero to the comic world even though he wasn't able to state that outright at the time.

And, another of John's cutting-edge storylines rounds out this collection. Of all the catastrophic events that could take place in the life of a super hero, no one before had even thought to deal with something as real and horrific as the loss of an unborn child. What greater challenge could anyone possibly face? Interestingly enough, I don't remember that this elicited much of any attention or reaction around the office. I don't remember anyone treating it like it was a big deal.

Many far more insignificant issues over the years have generated all sorts of debate resulting in storylines being massively rewritten or rejected entirely. Nothing like that happened with this story. Of course, even I only learned the details while I was lettering the job. Maybe the fact that the book was only in-house for a few days had something to do with the fact that *FF* #267 flew through the office without anyone so much as…raising an eyebrow.

2021

P.S. Hey! One more Thing! I would be remiss if I did not mention *Marvel Fanfare* #15, by one of my favorite artists of all time, Barry Windsor-Smith. While it falls outside mainstream continuity and was handled by a different editorial office, it was such beautiful work and so well-received that it inspired us to solicit a follow-up Thing miniseries by Barry. I lettered one issue of that follow-up before it was set aside by Barry.

Michael Higgins started his career with Marvel in 1978 as a Bullpen production staffer and over the next decade rose through the ranks, eventually becoming a full-fledged editor. After leaving his editorial position, Higgins continued to work for Marvel until 1999, writing, inking, coloring and lettering dozens of titles including Conan the Barbarian, *Wolverine in* Marvel Comics Presents, Punisher, Excalibur, Cable, X-51 *and* The Avengers.

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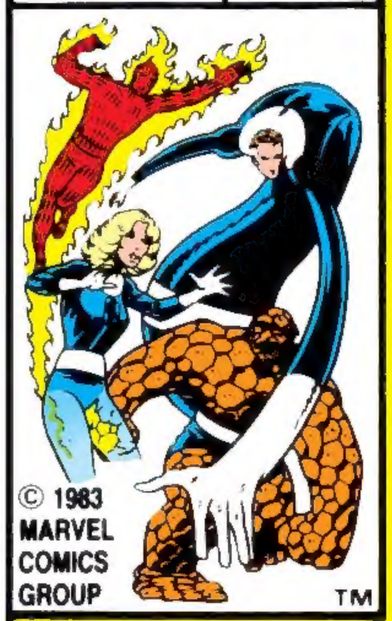
Fantastic Four®



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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

...S IS A ...EMBERS ...UR ...AN ...APE ...LIEN ...AS GLA...

...S IS NOT ...BER, BRO... ...E OF TH... ...IR GR... ...F VAST ...E POWE...

...IN ...EMY, ...E AND

...OCTOR...

STAN LEE PRESENTS PERHAPS THE STRANGEST ISSUE EVER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

INTERLUDE

THE TIME IS SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. IN **NEW YORK** THE MEMBERS OF THE **FANTASTIC FOUR** ARE RE-COUPERATING FROM AN ALL-OUT BATTLE WITH THE SHAPE-SHIFTING **SKRULLS** AND AN ALIEN SUPER-SOLDIER KNOWN AS **GLADIATOR.**

BUT THIS IS NOT NEW YORK, AND THIS SOMBER, BROODING FIGURE IS NOT ONE OF THE FF. HE IS, IN FACT, THEIR GREATEST ENEMY, A MAN OF VAST KNOWLEDGE AND AWESOME POWER.

HE IS **DOCTOR DOOM!**

OOOOO

IT IS GOOD.

MY BELOVED **LATVERIA** SUFFERED MUCH UNDER THE RULE OF THE USURPER **SORBA.** HE BROUGHT CRUEL LAWS AND GREAT PAIN TO THESE, MY LOYAL SUBJECTS.

IT WAS AS IF A HUGE AND TERRIBLE **PLAGUE** HAD FALLEN UPON THIS LITTLE COUNTRY, TOPPLING IT FROM ITS PLACE AS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL NATIONS ON **EARTH...**

TO A PITIFUL **JOKE** OF A COUNTRY, TOTTERING ON THE BRINK OF **ANNIHILATION.**

BUT NOW THE RULE OF **DOOM** IS RESTORED. THE PEOPLE PROSPER ONCE AGAIN. THE FIELDS ARE LUSH WITH GRAIN, THE SHOPS BULGE WITH LUXURIES.

ONCE MORE THERE IS NO CRIME, NO HUNGER, NO UNEMPLOYMENT IN ALL THE LAND. THE PROCESS OF REBUILDING **DOOMSTADT** GOES QUICKLY. THE PEOPLE ARE HAPPY AND CONTENT.

AS I HAVE **COMMANDED** THEY BE...

JOHN BYRNE
STORY AND ART

JIM NOVAK
LETTERING

GLYNIS WEIN
COLORING

CARL POTTS--EDITOR

JIM SHOOTER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

BUT, EVEN THE MUSINGS OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S LAST REIGNING **ABSOLUTE MONARCHS** DO NOT GO UNINTERRUPTED.

FORGIVE MY INTRUSION, **MASTER.** A **GYPSY GIRL** HAS ARRIVED AT THE MAIN GATE. SHE BEGS AN AUDIENCE WITH YOU.

DO NOT DISTRESS YOURSELF, LOYAL **BORIS.** IT IS TIME I TURNED MY MIND TO OTHER THINGS. HAVE THE GIRL BROUGHT IN.

AND, TIMID IN THE PRESENCE OF HER KING, THE WOMAN TELLS HER STORY...

...THUS IT HAS COME TO PASS THAT **DOCTOR STRANGE** IS WITHOUT A DISCIPLE. AS A MASTER OF BOTH SCIENCE AND **SORCERY**, HERR DOKTOR, I THOUGHT YOU WOULD WANT TO KNOW.

YOU HAVE SERVED YOUR LIEGE WELL, MY CHILD. I SHALL NOT FORGET THIS.

LEAVE ME NOW. I HAVE MUCH TO PONDER.

SO, THE MAN REPUTED TO BE EARTH'S **SORCERER SUPREME** IS BEREFT OF DISCIPLE, EH? IT WOULD BE UNSEEMLY FOR **VICTOR VON DOOM** TO ACKNOWLEDGE ANY MAN HIS MASTER...

AND YET, **STEPHEN STRANGE** DOES POSSESS KNOWLEDGE WHICH MIGHT BE OF USE TO ME.

THERE ARE SECRETS OF SORCERY WHICH I MIGHT WREST FROM HIM, WERE I TO DEVISE THE PROPER DECEPTIONS.

BUT, NO... I MUST NOT LEAVE MY PEOPLE NOW. THEY NEED THE FIRM HAND OF DOCTOR DOOM IN THIS HOUR, TO GUIDE THEM BACK TO PEACE AND PROSPERITY.

BUT, PERHAPS SOME DAY I SHALL MEET THIS DOCTOR STRANGE, AND THEN HE SHALL LEARN WHICH OF US IS TRULY THE MASTER.

AYE, SOME DAY...

BUT FOR NOW THERE ARE OTHER MATTERS TO CONCERN ME.

FIRST AND FOREMOST...

CERTAVIETVR

I MUST LOOK IN ON YOUNG KRISTOFF...

AND SO IN 1876 THE HEREDITARY MONARCHY OF LATVERIA PASSED FROM... OH...

GOOD MORNING, HERR DOKTOR.

MASTER?

MASTER!

MUCH OF THE WORLD LIVES IN FEAR OF THE MAN CALLED DOOM, BUT THE JOY THAT BLOOMS NOW IN THE CHILD'S HEART IS TOTALLY GENUINE...

AS IS THE WARMTH WHICH IS RETURNED.

THIS IS A SIDE OF DOCTOR DOOM THE WORLD RARELY SEES. THIS IS NOT THE CRUEL TYRANT, THE WIELDER OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION.

EVIL DOOM MAY BE, BUT ALSO A MAN OF *HONOR*, A MAN WHO PAYS HIS DEBTS.

KRISTOFF'S MOTHER DIED WHILST UNDER DOOM'S PROTECTION. IN THAT MOMENT, THOUGH HE DID NOT KNOW IT, THE CHILD BECAME A WARD OF THE STATE. SINCE THEN HE HAS WANTED FOR NOTHING...

LEAST OF ALL PARENTAL LOVE...

AND GOOD MORNING TO YOU, FRAULEIN MUELLER. HOW ARE THE LESSONS PROCEEDING?

OH, VERY WELL, HERR DOKTOR. KRISTOFF IS A WONDERFULLY BRIGHT CHILD. IT HAS RARELY BEEN MY PLEASURE TO TUTOR SO QUICK AND ATTENTIVE A STUDENT.

EXCEL-LENT.

THEN YOU WILL NOT MIND IF I BORROW HIM FOR AN HOUR OR SO. THERE ARE CERTAIN MATTERS OF STATE I MUST ATTEND TO, AND I HAVE REASONS TO WISH THAT KRISTOFF BE AWARE OF SUCH THINGS...

FIRST, KRISTOFF, SINCE MY RETURN TO POWER I HAVE NOT HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW THE ***ROBOTS*** I EMPLOY FOR SOME OF MY MORE MENIAL OPERATIONS.

THIS SEEMS AS GOOD A TIME AS ANY TO DO JUST THAT.

YES, MAS-TER.

SILENTLY, THE STEEL-CLAD MONARCH PACES BEFORE HIS DUPLICATES, UNTIL...

ROBOT A 76, YOU HAVE A SCRATCH ON THE SHOULDER OF YOUR ARMOR. YOU ARE NOT A COMBAT UNIT. HOW DID YOU COME TO BE DAMAGED?

THE HUMAN ***ARCADE*** STRUCK A MATCH THERE DURING OUR RECENT CONFRONTATION WITH THE MUTANT ***X-MEN***, SIRE. *

I SEE. AND IN WHAT MANNER DID YOU TERMINATE ARCADE FOR THIS AFFRONT TO THE PERSONNAGE OF DOOM?

I DID NOT TERMINATE HIM, MASTER. I JUDGED IT CONCEIVABLE YOU MIGHT HAVE NEED OF HIM LATER.

*SEE ISH #145-147 OF THAT MAG.

NEED?

DOOM NEEDS NO ONE.

REMEMBER THAT, KRISTOFF, IT IS AN IMPORTANT LESSON. A RULER MAY SURROUND HIMSELF WITH MANY UNDERLINGS, FOR HE CANNOT BE IN ALL PLACES AT ALL TIMES. BUT HE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT HE, AND HE ALONE IS *MASTER*.

Y-YES, MASTER.

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO ALL I HAVE TO TELL YOU, KRISTOFF. FROM NOW ON YOUR LIFE WILL BE A SINGLE, LONG EDUCATION--AND AN INVALUABLE ONE.

ONE THAT WILL TAKE YOU FAR. *VERY* FAR.

FOR CONSIDERABLY MORE THAN "AN HOUR OR SO" THE BOY STANDS BY DOOM, AS THE MASTER OF LATVERIA PRACTICES HIS UNIQUE BRAND OF JUSTICE.

ONE BY ONE THE DAY'S LIST OF SUPPLICANTS COME BEFORE HIM, AS LIKE SOME LATTER DAY **SOLOMON**, DOOM HANDS DOWN HIS RULINGS.

IN EACH INSTANCE HE RULES QUICKLY. FOR THE MOST PART HE IS *FAIR*...

ALWAYS HE IS *FINAL*...

I--I DO NOT UNDERSTAND, MASTER. WHY DID YOU WANT ME TO SEE ALL THIS?

TO LEARN, KRISTOFF. TO SEE HOW THE NATION IS BEST SERVED BY ITS RULER, WITH A FIRM AND UNYEILDING HAND.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO ME THAT YOU KNOW THESE THINGS.

OF THIS MATTER NO MORE IS SAID FOR THE PRESENT, AND SO THE BOY IS LEFT TO PONDER THE CRYPTIC WORDS OF THE KING OF LATVERIA...

THE DAYS ROLL SLOWLY BY...

SOME WEEKS LATER, AS THE FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN TINTS THE MIGHTY TOWERS OF CASTLE DOOM...

...THE PEOPLE OF DOOM-STADT BEGIN TO STIR.

BUT IN THE CASTLE ITSELF, DOCTOR DOOM HAS NOT WAITED FOR THE SUN TO BEGIN HIS DAY.

YOUR ARMOR IS READY FOR YOU, MASTER.

ROBOTIC HANDS MOVE WITH QUICK PRECISION, AS THE MANY PARTS OF DOOM'S COMPLEX GARB SLIP AND CLICK INTO PLACE.

ONLY THESE FOREVER LOYAL SERVANTS ARE PERMITTED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE UNARMORED DOOM, AND THOUGH THEIR DULL PHOTO-ELECTRIC EYES PASS OFTEN ACROSS HIS RUINED FACE...

...THEY REACT NOT AT ALL TO THE HORROR THEY FIND THERE.

WITHIN THE HOUR...

BREAKFAST IS TO YOUR LIKING, MASTER?

EXCELLENT, AS ALWAYS, PIERRE. YOU NEVER CEASE TO EXCEL YOURSELF.

BZZKT!

WHO DARES DISTURB DOOM AT TABLE?

IT IS I, *HAUPTMANN*, MASTER. YOU ORDERED ME TO CALL YOU...

THE MOMENT THE *PROJECT* WAS COMPLETE...

WITHIN SECONDS, IN AN ELEVATOR PLUNGING INTO THE CASTLE'S DEPTHS...

AT LAST! AT LONG LAST!

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN UNDER WAY SO MANY MONTHS I HAD ALMOST DESPAIRED OF EVER SEEING IT REACH FRUITION.

WITH ANTICIPATION PULSING IN HIS VEINS, DOOM'S MIND TURNS BACK, BACK TO THAT DAY WHEN YEARS AGO, HE HAD SUCCEEDED IN LURING IN-TO HIS CASTLE THE BANISHED HERALD OF **GALACTUS**, THE SUPREMELY POWERFUL **SILVER SURFER.**

TRICKING THE SURFER INTO BELIEVING HIM TO BE A BENEVOLENT SCIENTIST...

...DOOM WAS ABLE TO USE HIS VAST TECHNOLOGICAL SKILLS TO CATCH THE SKY-RIDER UNAWARES.

AND THE DICTATOR DRAINED FROM HIS ARGENT FORM THE STAR-SPANNING POWER.

THUS ELEVATED ALMOST TO **GODHOOD** DOOM WENT **MAD**, AND SET FORTH UPON A CAMPAIGN OF CONQUEST AND DESTRUCTION.

NO ONE, IT SEEMED, COULD STAND AGAINST HIM.

BUT **REED RICHARDS**, LEADER OF THE **FANTASTIC FOUR**, WAS ABLE TO TRICK DOOM.

CLUTCHING A MECHA-NISM HE BELIEVED HAD BEEN DESIGNED TO STRIP HIM OF THE POWER COSMIC, DOOM FLEW TO THE VERY THRESHOLD OF SPACE...

THERE TO SMASH AGAINST THE BARRIER **GALACTUS** HAD SET TO HOLD HIS REBELLIOUS SILVER HERALD FOR-EVER PRISONER ON EARTH.*

*FOR A MORE COMPLETE VERSION SEE FF #'S 57 THRU 60.

THOUGH DOOM SURVIVED, THE COSMIC POWER RETURNED TO THE SURFER, LOST TO DOOM FOR ALL TIME...

OR SO IT SEEMED...

WELL, HAUPT-MANN?

EXCELLENCY! SO GOOD OF YOU TO LEAVE YOUR MEAL! AS YOU CAN SEE THE MECHANISM IS COMPLETE! I HAVE FOLLOWED YOUR INSTRUCTIONS EXACTLY.

I HAVE TAKEN THE LIBERTY OF ENGAGING THE PRIMARY SEQUENCES. EVEN NOW THE ENERGIES ARE BUILDING WITHIN THE COMPLEX MACHINERIES. WITHIN MINUTES THEY WILL HAVE ACHIEVED CRUCIAL ENERGIZATION.

IT WILL THEN REMAIN ONLY TO ACTIVATE THE FINAL SWITCH...

VERY GOOD, HAUPT-MANN. VERY GOOD. YOU HAVE SERVED YOUR MASTER WELL.

DOOM IS PLEASED.

YOU *HONOR* ME, DOCTOR. NOW, IF YOU WILL TAKE YOUR PLACE IN THE INDUCTION CHAIR.

VERY SOON THE POWER OF THE *SILVER SURFER* WILL BE YOURS AGAIN.

NO, NO, DEAR, LOYAL HAUPTMANN. FOR YOUR LONG LABORS ON MY BEHALF IT IS ONLY FITTING THAT THE HONOR OF BEING SO EMPOWERED BELONG TO **YOU!**

NO, MASTER! NO! NO DON'T!

DO NOT FEAR, HAUPTMANN. THINK ONLY OF THE GLORIES THAT WILL BE YOURS AS POSSESSOR OF THE POWER COSMIC.

NO! DOOM DON'T DO...

NOW, A SINGLE SWITCH NEED MERELY BE THROWN...

AND THE **COSMOS** SHALL BE YOURS...

IT BEGINS...

FROM SOMEWHERE DEEP INSIDE THE ARCANE ENGINES A SOUND BEGINS. A SOUND LIKE NONE EVER HEARD ON EARTH.

RAW POWER CORUSCATES THROUGH HAUPTMANN'S FRAIL BODY. HIS LIMBS EXPAND, HIS MIND FILLS WITH CONCEPTS BEYOND HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.

AND HE SCREAMS.

SCREAMS WITH EVERY LAST ATOM OF BREATH IN HIS TORTURED LUNGS. SCREAMS UNTIL HIS SCREAM DROWNS OUT THE AWFUL NOISE OF THE MACHINE.

SCREAMS UNTIL THERE IS NOTHING LEFT WITH WHICH TO SCREAM...

TSK TSK. POOR, POOR HAUPTMANN. EVIDENTLY HE WAS NOT SO SUCCESSFUL AS HE BELIEVED.

MASTER, YOUR ACTIONS DISTURB MY PROTECTIVE CIRCUITS. IF HAUPTMANN HAD RECEIVED THE ***POWER COSMIC*** HE MIGHT HAVE USED IT AGAINST YOU--HE MIGHT HAVE ***DESTROYED*** YOU.

THERE WAS NO DANGER OF THAT EVENTUALITY, A-17.

I HAD SUSPECTED THE ARTIFICIALLY RE-CREATED POWER MIGHT BE TOO UNSTABLE FOR A HUMAN BODY TO CONTAIN. HAUPTMANN'S ***EAGERNESS*** CONFIRMED THIS.

HE HAD LONG HATED ME FOR KILLING HIS BROTHER. HAD DEAR HAUPTMANN TRULY SUCCEEDED HE WOULD HAVE ALREADY USED THE MACHINE ON HIMSELF.

BUT, ONE SIDE NOW.

THERE IS MUCH TO DO.

MANY LONG HOURS LATER...

MASTER, ARE YOU BUSY? I HAVE COME TO SAY GOOD-NIGHT.

HMM?

AH--KRISTOFF. COME IN, LAD. COME IN.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MASTER?

SEARCHING, KRISTOFF. SEARCHING THROUGH MY ARCHIVES FOR SOMEONE POWERFUL ENOUGH THAT I MAY PLACE WITHIN THEM THE AWESOME POWER OF THE SILVER SURFER, YET CRAVEN ENOUGH THAT I MAY USE HIM TO FURTHER MY GREATEST PLAN.

WHAT OF THE EVIL MUTANT KNOWN AS ***MAGNETO***, MASTER? I HAVE READ THAT HIS POWER RIVALS EVEN YOURS...

...RIVALS...

NO ONE RIVALS DOOM!

NO ONE!

DOOM IS SUPREME! THERE IS NO POWER ON EARTH, NO INTELLECT IN ALL CREATION TO EQUAL *MINE!*

MASTER... YOU'RE HURTING ME!

BE GONE FROM MY SIGHT! YOU HAVE ANGERED ME BEYOND MEASURE. GO TO YOUR QUARTERS AND REMAIN UNTIL I SUMMON YOU AGAIN!

Y-YES, MASTER!

STUPID, INSOLENT CHILD! TO EVEN SUGGEST THAT A *FREAK* SUCH AS MAGNETO COULD BE A RIVAL TO *DOOM*--MAGNETO, WHO HAS LATELY PERMITTED FOOLISH HUMAN WEAKNESS TO DILUTE HIS OWN SCHEMES OF CONQUEST.

NO. THE ERSTWHILE MASTER OF THE *BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS* IS OF NO USE TO DOOM...

BUT THERE MUST BE *SOMEONE*--AND THIS WRETCHED COMPUTER WILL GIVE ME A NAME OR I WILL SMASH ITS USELESS CIRCUITS TO...

WAIT... A NAME APPEARS. A NAME I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF FOR MYSELF!

IF TRULY HE STILL LIVES, HE WILL BE PERFECT FOR MY PLAN, MY *GOAL*...

THE ULTIMATE *DESTRUCTION* OF THE *FANTASTIC FOUR!*

LET FORTY-EIGHT HOURS ROLL QUICKLY BY, AS WE TURN FROM THE VALLEY KINGDOM NESTLED IN THE BAVARIAN ALPS...

...TO THE MAN-MADE MOUNTAINS AND CANYONS OF EARTH'S GREATEST CITY, NEW YORK, NEW YORK.

SPECIFICALLY, LOOK TO THIS BUILDING...

ONE OF THE MANY HOSPITALS DOTTED ABOUT THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN, SERVING HER SICK AND INJURED; THE CASUALTIES OF HER TEEMING MILLIONS.

IN A DARKENED CORRIDOR...

THEY MOVE ALMOST SILENTLY, THE THICK FOAM ON THEIR SOLES CUSHIONING THEIR METAL FEET FROM THE COLD FLOOR...

A GLANCE WOULD BE MORE THAN ENOUGH TO TELL THEY DO NOT BELONG HERE.

...CERTAINLY HOPE ***BEN*** WILL RECOVER, ***IRON MAN***. HE'S BEEN THROUGH AN AWFUL LOT, LATELY.

I WOULDN'T WORRY TOO MUCH, CAP. THE ***THING'S*** ONE OF THE TOUGHEST MEN ALIVE. HE'LL PULL THROUGH ***FINE.****

*FOR THE FULL STORY BEHIND THIS DISCUSSION SEE ***MARVEL 2-IN-1*** #96.

CAPTAIN AMERICA AND IRON MAN. THEY SPOKE OF A ***MEMBER*** OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR. IF HE IS HERE WE COULD...

NO, UNIT SEVEN. THE MASTER IS AWARE OF THE THING'S LOCATION AND CONDITION.

OUR INSTRUCTIONS ARE TO LEAVE HIM UNMOLESTED. COME, WE HAVE ANOTHER MISSION HERE.

MOMENTS LATER...

MORNIN', BOB. HOW'S OUR *JOHN DOE* TODAY?

UNCHANGED, JIM. I SWEAR, THAT GUY ALMOST MAKES ME BELIEVE IN *MIRACLES.* THEY FIND HIM STARK NAKED IN A GARBAGE PILE, EVERY MAJOR BONE IN HIS BODY BROKEN...

STILL GOT HIM ON THE GLUCOSE MARTINIS?

YEP. THAT SUGAR AND ALCOHOL SOLUTION SEEMS TO BE HOLDING HIS CONDITION, BUT IT'S HARD TO TELL IF HE'S HEALING OR NOT. NONE OF HIS CHEMISTRIES COME OUT ANYTHING LIKE THE WAY THEY SHOULD BE. IF ONLY HE COULD SPEAK *ENGLISH*--OR ANY LANGUAGE WE KNOW.

IT SOUNDS CRAZY, BUT I'M HALFWAY CONVINCED HE'S NOT EVEN *HUMAN*...

QUICKLY UNIT FIVE--THIS IS THE CORRECT CHAMBER. DISPOSE OF THE BODIES AND LET US PROCEED WITH *PHASE THREE.*

THERE IS A STORAGE COMPARTMENT BEHIND YOU. I WILL SECRET THEM THERE. MAKE CONTACT WITH OUR TARGET.

THE ROOM IS AS PLEASANT AS A SICKROOM CAN BE, BUT THE ROBOT'S SENSORS TELL HIM ALL IS NOT RIGHT HERE...

...AND THE FIGURE ON THE BED GLARES AT THE INTRUDER WITH TERRIBLE *HATRED*...

QUICKLY NOW, SEVEN. DETACH THE *TARGET* FROM THE LIFE-SUPPORT SYSTEMS.

UNDER WAY, FIVE. TAKE CARE OF THE WINDOW.

SKTASHHKT!

SENSORS DETECT ALARMS SOUNDING. WE MUST MAKE HASTE.

BE CAREFUL, UNIT FIVE.

THE MASTER WISHES NO FURTHER DAMAGE TO COME TO THIS SPECIMEN.

HURRY, FIVE. WE TRACK MANY SUPER-POWERED ENTITIES IN THIS VICINITY.

DO NOT DISTRESS, FIFTEEN. THE TARGET IS SECURED.

WE NEED ONLY LOAD HIM SAFELY ABOARD...

...AND WE CAN DEPART. SIX, INITIATE RETURN PROGRAM *NOW!*

DONE, SEVEN.

WITHIN FOUR HOURS THE SLEEK CRAFT IS FLASHING ACROSS THE TREETOPS OF LATVERIA, BOUND FOR HOME...

AND, EXACTLY SIX WEEKS LATER...

WELL, PHYSICIAN? HOW FARES YOUR PATIENT?

AH, MASTER, I WAS JUST ABOUT TO CALL YOU. I BELIEVE HE IS READY.

YOU ARE CERTAIN? I AM PREPARED TO WAIT A FEW MORE DAYS IF NECESSARY.

NO NEED, MASTER. HIS BODY HAS COMPLETELY HEALED. THE TREATMENT YOU PRESCRIBED WORKED PERFECTLY. MY ONLY CONCERN WAS THAT HIS ALIEN METABOLISM MIGHT REJECT THE TRANSLATOR IMPLANT, BUT THAT HAS NOT OCCURRED.

EXCELLENT! IT WOULD SEEM THEN TIME THAT I INTRODUCED MYSELF TO OUR... GUEST.

...ER... FORGIVE ME, MASTER, BUT YOUR GARB IS NOT STERILE...

NO MATTER, PHYSICIAN.

AFTER TODAY HE WILL NOT NEED TO BE PROTECTED BY HIS ENVIRONMENTAL CUBE.

AFTER TODAY HE WILL BE MINE TO COMMAND!

WHO DARES! WHO DARES DISTURB TYROS THE TERRIBLE?!

PAUSE A MOMENT NOW. STUDY CAREFULLY THE TABLEAU UNFOLDING HERE BEFORE YOU: ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL HUMANS OF ALL EARTH'S TORTURED HISTORY FACES AN ALIEN BEING ONCE ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL IN THE COSMOS. HOW CAN WHAT HAPPENS NEXT BODE WELL FOR ANYONE, LEAST OF ALL THE ***FANTASTIC FOUR***?

SO IT IS ***TYROS***, IS IT? THEN I DEDUCED CORRECTLY THAT YOUR RECENT MEMORIES WERE STRIPPED AWAY, ALONG WITH YOUR COSMIC POWERS.

YOU PRATTLE WITHOUT MEANING, ARMORED ONE. WHO ARE YOU? WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

ANSWER QUICKLY, OR BY MARMAN'S SEVEN RINGS I WILL CRUSH YOUR ARMOR FLAT--WITH YOU INSIDE IT!

YOUR RAGE IS MAGNIFICENT, TYROS. AND JUSTLY SO. BUT DIRECT IT NOT AGAINST THE PERSON OF ***DOOM***, FOR YOUR LIFE NOW RESTS IN THE HOLLOW OF MY HAND.

I AM MASTER HERE, TYROS, AND BEFORE YOU PROTEST THAT IRREVOCABLE FACT, YOU WOULD DO WELL TO LISTEN. LISTEN...

AND LEARN.

"DO NOT QUESTION HOW I GAINED SUCH KNOWLEDGE, TYROS, BUT BE ASSURED I KNOW YOU, KNOW WHO AND WHAT YOU ARE.

"ONCE YOU RULED THE CITY OF LANLAK, IN THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE OF A WORLD CALLED ***BIRJ***, FIFTH MOON OF THE GAS GIANT MARMAN, EIGHTY THOUSAND LIGHT YEARS FROM EARTH.

"YOU WERE CONTENT WITH YOUR PETTY TYRANNY, BUT YOU FELL UNDER THE GAZE OF *GALACTUS.*

"GALACTUS! HE WHO IS POWER PERSONIFIED, THE ONE BEING IN ALL THE UNIVERSE BEFORE WHOM EVEN DOOM MUST TREMBLE. *GALACTUS*, DEVOURER OF WORLDS, WHO FEEDS ON THE LIFE-ENERGIES OF ENTIRE *PLANETS!*

"HE HAD NEED OF A NEW HERALD, A NEW SLAVE TO SEARCH THE COSMOS FOR SUITABLE FOOD-WORLDS.

"AND, TYROS OF LANLAK, HE HAD CHOSEN *YOU!*

"AT THE WILL AND HAND OF *GALACTUS* WERE YOU EMPOWERED AND TRANSFORMED. NO LONGER THE LOWLY DICTATOR OF AN UNIMPORTANT CITY-STATE...

"...NOW YOU WERE THE *MASTER* OF ALL THINGS ROCK AND EARTH.

"NOW YOU WERE *TERRAX, THE TAMER!*

"BUT, LIKE SO MANY BEFORE YOU, YOU TURNED UPON YOUR MASTER, THINKING YOUR OWN PUNY POWER TO BE A MATCH FOR HIS COSMIC *ALL!*

"ON EARTH HE STRIPPED YOU OF YOUR ENERGIES,

"TRANSFORMING EVEN AS YOU FELL, YOU PLUNGED FROM THE TOP OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER...

"PLUNGED APPARENTLY TO A CERTAIN DEATH...

BUT, THOUGH YOU FELL, NOT ALL THE FALL WAS IN YOUR MORTAL FORM. YOU WERE SMASHED ALMOST TO JELLY, BUT YOU SURVIVED. AND IT IS YOUR VERY SURVIVAL THAT TELLS ME YOU ARE SUITABLE FOR A PROJECT I HAVE IN MIND.

YOUR STORY HAS A STRANGE RING OF *TRUTH*, ONE-CALLED-DOOM. SAY ON.

THE TIME FOR WORDS IS PAST, TYROS. TIME IS NOW RIPE FOR *ACTION!*

THUS... I...DO NOT UNDERSTAND THESE MACHINES, NOR THIS STRANGE GARB.

WITHIN THESE MECHANISMS I HAVE CREATED, ARTIFICIALLY, A TINY SPARK, TYROS, A SPARK THAT IS AS NOTHING BEFORE THE FIRE OF **GALACTUS.**

YET THAT SPARK IS SUFFICIENT TO GENERATE WITHIN YOUR BODY A FORCE TO EQUAL THAT OF THE FIRST HERALD OF **GALACTUS**, THE **SILVER SURFER.**

BUT THAT POWER IS UNSTABLE, AND YOU WILL NEED THAT SPECIAL GARMENT TO CHANNEL AND CONTROL THE ENERGIES PROPERLY.

BUT ENOUGH TALK, TYROS. YOU ARE ABOUT TO BE RE-BORN...

FOR THE **SECOND** TIME!

AGAIN THE SWITCH IS THROWN...

AGAIN THE MYSTERIOUS ENERGIES BURST FROM THE SURROUNDING MACHINES...

AGAIN A MORTAL FORM IS SUBJECTED TO THE BOMBARDMENT BY POWERS ALMOST BEYOND COMPREHENSION...

AND THOUGH IT IS EXTRAORDINARILY **PAINFUL...**

THIS TIME, AT LEAST, IT IS NOT **FATAL...**

YAAAAARGH!

TYROS! ROBOTS, SEIZE HIM!

HOLD HIM FAST, MY UNLIVING SLAVES. THE *POWER* SURGES WITHIN HIM.

IT MAY HAVE DRIVEN HIM INTO *MADNESS*...

NO... DOOM...

TYROS IS NOT MAD...

TYROS *REMEMBERS!* REMEMBERS THE COSMIC GLORY, THE BOUNDLESS POWER TO CRUSH AND SHATTER AND SMASH *WORLDS.*

TYROS REMEMBERS THE UNSPEAKABLE *JOYS*, THE DARK AND EVIL *PLEASURES.*

AND MORE, TYROS REMEMBERS WHOSE FAULT IT IS THAT THESE THINGS ARE NOW LOST TO HIM...

THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

GOOD, TYROS. GOOD. KNOW YOU THEN THAT YOUR ENEMIES ARE MINE ALSO--THAT I HAVE RAISED YOU THUS TO DESTROY THEM FOREVER.

THE POWER TO LEVEL MOUNTAINS AT WILL MAY NO LONGER BE YOURS, BUT I THINK YOU WILL FIND ENOUGH FORCE TO SHATTER THEM...

AND TO SEND YOU ON YOUR MISSION OF VENGEANCE, A SPECIAL *SKY-SLED* OF MY OWN INVENTION.

IT LOOKS TOO FRAIL, DOOM. IT IS ENOUGH TO SUIT MY PURPOSE?

A FEW MINUTES LATER...

WELL, TYROS, IS YOUR QUESTION ANSWERED?

COMPLETELY, DOOM. IT IS AS IF THE SLED IS AN EXTENSION OF MY OWN BODY.

THEN GO, TYROS.

GO AND SEEK YOU OUR ENEMIES.

I AM GONE, DOOM. AND THE LIVES OF THE ACCURSED QUARTET CAN NOW BE MEASURED IN *HOURS!*

MASTER, I MUST QUESTION THE WISDOM OF THIS COURSE OF ACTION. WITH THE ALIEN TYROS THUS EMPOWERED...

HE PRESENTS NO MORE THREAT TO ME THAN DID HAUPTMANN, ROBOT. I HAVE NOT, YOU SEE, TOLD TYROS QUITE THE ***ENTIRE*** TRUTH.

THE TECHNO-SUIT HE WEARS DOES MORE THAN CONTROL THE ENERGIES NOW RAMPANT WITHIN HIM. IT SERVES ALSO AS A LIFE-SUPPORT SYSTEM, DELAYING THE DESTRUCTION MET BY HAUPTMANN.

TYROS HAS NO MORE THAN FIVE HOURS OF LIFE, BEFORE THE SUIT BURNS OUT AND THE ***POWER COSMIC*** CONSUMES HIM.

BUT THAT WILL BE ENOUGH TIME FOR HIM TO SUBJUGATE ***REED RICHARDS*** AND HIS THREE PARTNERS. THEN ***I*** SHALL DELIVER THE *COUP DE GRACE...*

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

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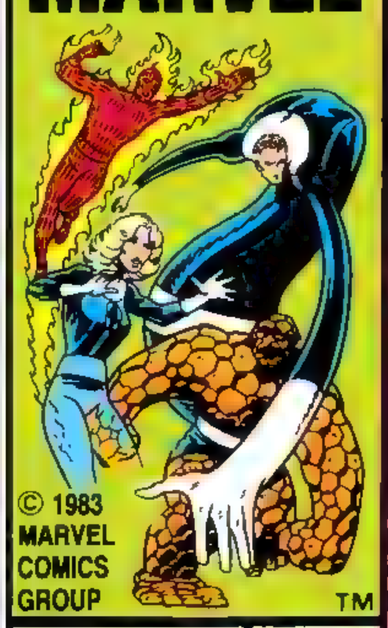

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

Fantastic Four®

THREE AGAINST DOOMSDAY!

STAN LEE PRESENTS A BOLD NEW BEGINNING FOR THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

CHOICES

BELLE PORT, CONNECTICUT. THE SIGN ON THE FRONT LAWN READS SIMPLY "FOR SALE." BUT TO THIS WOMAN IT MAY WELL SAY SOMETHING ELSE...

...HOME.

HELLO? IS ANYONE HERE?

MRS. BENJAMIN? IS THAT YOU?

JOHN BYRNE STORY & ART / GLYNIS WEIN COLORIST / JIM NOVAK LETTERER / BOB BUDIANSKY EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR IN CHIEF

OOOPS! I ALMOST ANSWERED "NO". I CHOSE "BENJAMIN" AS AN EASY NAME FOR US ALL TO REMEMBER, BUT IT LOOKS AS IF THIS SECRET IDENTITY BUSINESS MAY BE TRICKIER THAN I THOUGHT.

GUESS I'M TOO USED TO BEING CALLED ***SUSAN STORM RICHARDS.***

YES, I'M SUSAN BENJAMIN. ARE YOU THE LADY I SPOKE TO ON THE TELEPHONE?

MARTHA WINSLOW, YES. I'M IN CHARGE OF SHOWING THIS HOUSE TO PROSPECTIVE BUYERS. I SUPPOSE THAT'S A STEP UP FROM MY NORMAL ROLE OF NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR.

OH, THEN I TAKE IT YOU'RE A FRIEND OF THE OWNERS?

YES INDEED! ***FAITH*** AND I GO BACK JUST FOR-EVER AND EVER!

LET ME JUST CLOSE THIS... UMF... DOOR. SOMETIMES IT'S A LITTLE STIFF.

AND THERE GOES ANY THEORY SHE MIGHT BE A PROFESSIONAL BROKER.

THIS SEEMS A VERY PLEASANT HOUSE.

I LOVE THE SIZE OF THE ROOMS--AT LEAST WHAT I'VE SEEN. BUT IS THE WHOLE HOUSE ***PANELED*** LIKE THIS?

JUST THE LIVING ROOM AND UPSTAIRS HALL. OH, AND ONE WALL IN THE DINING ROOM.

DON'T YOU LIKE IT?

WELL, IT'S A BIT ...MONOTONOUS. I LIKE VARIETY.

BUT I SUPPOSE IF WE DO END UP BUYING WE CAN ALWAYS REDECORATE.

NICE DINING ROOM.

ISN'T IT, THOUGH? THE KITCHEN IS THROUGH HERE. UMM, I DON'T THINK I ASKED WHAT YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND ***DO?***

REED IS... IN RESEARCH.

I'M NOT DOING MUCH OF ANYTHING JUST NOW. I'M HOPING TO TAKE IT EASY FOR A WHILE.

YOU SEE, MY HUS-BAND AND I ARE EXPECTING OUR SECOND CHILD...

OH, HOW ***WONDER-FUL.*** GEORGE AND I HAVE NO CHILDREN.

YOU'LL WANT TO SEE THE UPSTAIRS NOW, I...

OH...

BY THE WAY, I'M AFRAID THIS ANTIQUE DOESN'T COME WITH THE HOUSE.

IT DOESN'T? OH, WHAT A... PITY.

YES. BUT I'M AFRAID FAITH WAS QUITE FIRM ON THAT.

OH WELL, I SUPPOSE WE'LL JUST HAVE TO MUDDLE THROUGH WITHOUT...

BING BONG

NOW WHO COULD THAT BE?

WHY, HELLO *KATIE*. HOW ARE YOU TODAY?

FINE THANKS, MRS. WINSLOW. I WAS BABYSITTING *DANNY* AND WE SAW A LADY COME TO LOOK AT THE HOUSE.

AND YOU THOUGHT YOU SAW BUSINESS?

WELL, I THINK YOU MAY BE IN LUCK. MRS. BENJAMIN, THIS IS KATE DWYER, OUR LOCAL BABYSITTING MAGNATE.

HI, MRS. BENJAMIN. DO YOU HAVE ANY KIDS WHO NEED SITTING?

I HADN'T EVEN THOUGHT OF THAT. IN NEW YORK WE'VE ALWAYS DEPENDED UPON *ALICIA* OR ONE OF REED'S ROBOT NANNIES...

WHY, YES, KATE. I SUPPOSE WE WILL NEED A SITTER ONCE IN A WHILE.

AN HOUR OR SO LATER...

WELL, THAT'S IT! ALL THE COMPLEX LITTLE REAL ESTATE WHEELS HAVE BEEN SET TO TURNING. IN A FEW DAYS THE FAMILY "BENJAMIN" WILL BE HOMEOWNERS.

WHAT AN EXPERIENCE *THIS* HAS BEEN! IT'S A LONG TIME SINCE I'VE LIVED IN DARK-EST SUBURBIA. NOT SINCE BEFORE REED AND I GOT MARRIED.

FOR SALE

I KNOW THIS ADVENTURE INTO SECRET IDENTITIES IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO GIVE OUR SON *FRANKLIN* SOMETHING LIKE A NORMAL LIFE, BUT I HOPE REED AND I WON'T GET CABIN FEVER SO FAR FROM THE BIG CITY.

AH, THERE'S MY *FANTASTI-CAR* SEGMENT, RIGHT WHERE I LEFT IT.

*HER **COSMIC-RAY**-SPAWNED POWER REACHES OUT, AND LIGHT WAVES BEND AROUND SUSAN RICHARDS AND HER VEHICLE...*

IT WAS BEST THAT I DO THE HOUSE-HUNTING, RATHER THAN *REED*.

THERE ARE THINGS THE *INVISIBLE GIRL* CAN DO THAT EVEN *MISTER FANTASTIC* CAN'T.

SO LONG, BELLE PORT. I WONDER WHAT YOU'D ALL THINK IF YOU KNEW THE *FAN-TASTIC FOUR* ARE COMING TO TOWN!

I'M OUT OF RANGE OF PRYING EYES NOW. SO, I CAN BECOME VISIBLE AGAIN...

...AND TAKE OFF THIS VERY UNGLAMOROUS WIG!

MEANWHILE, EVEN AS THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S BEAUTIFUL DISTAFF MEMBER GUIDES HER CURIOUS CRAFT WESTWARD TOWARD HOME...

...A SLEEK DC-9 WINGS IN OVER NEW YORK'S BUSTLING LA GUARDIA AIRPORT...

...THERE TO DISGORGE A VERY NERVOUS GROUP OF PASSENGERS...

I...I'VE NEVER HAD SUCH A TERRIFYING FLIGHT!

ME NEITHER! I KEPT EXPECTING US T' GET BLOWN OUTTA TH' SKY!

THIS IS ABSOLUTELY OUTRAGEOUS! YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO SUBJECT YOUR PASSENGERS TO SUCH DANGERS!

ATLANTA

CANADA

D

WHAT GIVES? I THOUGHT THEY HAD GOOD WEATHER...

CHECK THE PASSENGER LIST.

"BEN GRIMM IS ON THAT FLIGHT!"

JUST GREAT! AS IF IT WEREN'T ROUGH ENOUGH FOR ME THE PAST COUPLA DAYS...*

...I GOTTA WIND UP WITH A PLANE FULLA FOLKS WHO TREAT ME LIKE I WUZ TYPHOID MARY!

*SEE FANTASTIC FOUR #'S 256-257 AND THE THING #'S 3-4 -- BOB.

DOES IT HAFTA BE THAT WAY EVERY TIME ONE OF TH' FF USES PUBLIC TRANSPORT?

DOES EVERYBODY THINK ONE OF OUR ENEMIES IS GONNA ATTACK US ANY SECOND?

MEL'S TAXI

TAXI

AW... *NUTS!* I JUST NEED TA GET HOME AND INTA A NICE HOT BATH.

TH' *BAXTER BUILDING*, PAL, AN' STEP ON IT!

H-HOLY CATS! YOU'RE THE *THING!*

GO T' TH' HEAD OF TH' CLASS, BRIGHT BOY. NOW GET ROLLIN', WILL YA?

THUS THE CAB MERGES INTO THE STEEL AND RUBBER SNAKE SLITHERING SLOWLY TOWARDS THE MIDTOWN TUNNEL...

...AS THE THOUGHTS OF THE MIGHTY-MUSCLED THING TURN TO DARKNESS...

WHEN I THINK A' HOW GLAD I WUZ TA HEAR REED SAY TH' FF AIN'T GONNA BREAK UP, EVEN THOUGH HIM AN' SUZIE ARE MOVIN' OUTTA TH' BAXTER BUILDING...

...IT DON'T HARDLY SEEM POSSIBLE I COULD GET TURNED AROUND SO MUCH IN JUST A COUPLA DAYS. BUT MY FAITH IN HUMAN NATURE'S TAKEN A HECKUVA POUNDIN' LATELY, WHAT WITH ***QUICKSILVER*** AN' THAT KID, ***LUCAS.****

MAKES ME WONDER IF I'M REALLY CUT OUT FER TH' SUPER-HERO BIZ. NOT MUCH ELSE A ***FREAK*** LIKE ME CAN DO, BUT...

PLAYBILL

*SEE THE THING #'S 3-4 --BOB.

HOLY COW!

WHAT TH' BLUE BLAZES WUZ THAT!?!

TAXI

AW, NO! NOT ***YOU!***

IT CAN'T BE ***YOU!***

BUT IT IS, FOOL! IT IS!! THOUGH YOU MAY HAVE THOUGHT ME DEAD BY THE HAND OF WORLD-DEVOURING ***GALACTUS***, I AM RISEN, MORE POWERFUL THAN EVER I WAS BEFORE!

NOW AND FOREVER MORE AM I **TYROS THE TERRIBLE!**

SO IT'S BACK TA ***TYROS***, HUH? WELL, I WUZ NEVER MUCH IMPRESSED WHEN YA WERE WORKIN' FOR GALACTUS AN' CALLIN' YERSELF ***TERRAX***, EITHER!

TH' WAY I SEE IT, PAL, A BOZO BY ANY NAME STILL AIN'T GONNA SMELL LIKE A ROSE...

...OR, TA PUT THAT ANOTHER WAY...

IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!

SMASH!

FOOL! STUPID PUNY FOOL! YOU DARE PIT YOUR PUNY STRENGTH AGAINST THE CONSUMMATE POWER OF TYROS?

MINE IS THE *POWER COSMIC!* THE ULTIMATE POWER OF *GALACTUS* HIMSELF!

POWER TO SWAT YOU LIKE A FLY!

YEOW! GOTTA BE CAREFUL--LOOKS LIKE HE CAN THROW ZAPS WITHOUT THAT CRUMMY AXE HE USED TA HAVE...

...OTHERWISE HE COULDN'T A' SLICED THE CAB IN HALF!

NOW I SHALL TASTE THE FIRST SWEET NECTAR OF MY REVENGE. NOW...

NOW *NUTHIN'* BALDY. BOY, IF THERE'S ONE THING BURNS MY BUTT MORE'N ANYTHING IT'S A SUPER-GOON MAKIN' *SPEECHES!*

WELL, YA CAN SAVE YERS FER TH' WARDEN, PAL. YER GOIN'...

IMBECILE! YOU THINK THIS FRAIL METAL CAN HOLD ME? SAVE YOU FROM MY WRATH?

NO LONGER AM I *TERRAX THE TAMER*, YET STILL MAY I DO...

THIS!

BLAST IT! I DIDN'T EXPECT HIM TA BE ABLE TA DO THAT!

BUT I SHOULDA GUESSED. *GALACTUS* GAVE EACH OF HIS HERALDS A POWER BASED ON ONE A' TH' FOUR ELEMENTS... EARTH, AIR, FIRE OR WATER.

HE MUSTA PICKED TYROS FOR EARTH 'CAUSE MR.T ALREADY HAD SOME LATENT EARTH CONTROL.

AN' NOW HE'S SOMEHOW GOT HIS POWER BACK, AN' HE'S SOME-HOW INCREASED IT TOO!

THESE THOUGHTS AND MORE FLASH SWIFTLY THROUGH THE THING'S MIND...

THEN...

RUNG!!

MEANWHILE...

NOW TO FREE MYSELF OF THIS CRUDE COCCOON AND PRESS THE ATTACK.

THE SHARP METAL EDGES HAVE SHREDDED MUCH OF MY GAR-MENT...

...YET, I AM UN-HARMED... AND FEEL SOMEHOW...*STRONGER!* THE POWER COSMIC FAIRLY THUNDERS IN EVERY FIBER OF MY BEING!

HE WHO RESURRECTED ME, SAVED ME FROM THE LIVING HELL TO WHICH I WAS CONDEMNED BY *GALACTUS*...

...THAT "SAVIOUR" MUST HAVE MEANT THE CLOTHES HE GAVE ME TO CONTROL MY POWER, THAT I MIGHT NOT TURN IT AGAINST HIM!

BUT AS FOR NOW IT IS THE ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION OF THE *FANTASTIC FOUR* WHICH IS MY GREATEST DESIRE! THEN SHALL IT BE YOUR TURN, MY "SAVIOUR"--

--DR. DOOM!

NOT FAR AWAY...

MAN-O-MAN! JUST ABOUT... SHOOK HANDS... WITH TH' REAPER THAT TIME!

NOW, WHERE DID I GET DUMPED...?

AW, NO! RIGHT IN FRONT OF A SUPERMARKET!

SHOP-RITE

BACON

SPECIAL HEAD LETTUCE 39¢ lb.

THERE'S CIVILIANS ALL OVER TH' PLACE. GOTTA CHASE 'EM OUTTA HERE BEFORE...

HUH?

THE TIME HAS COME, BEN GRIMM. THE MOMENT OF YOUR ANNIHILATION IS AT LAST AT HAND!

BETTER MEN THAN YOU HAVE SAID THAT, BUNKY, AN' I'M STILL HERE.

DO YER WORST!

LOOK at these VALUES

ZAPPO ROACH KILLER $1.29 ea.

FAB

CLEEN

CAMELOT SOUPS

DAIRY

98¢ A DOZEN

AT THAT PRECISE MOMENT, SOME MILES AWAY ON THE ISLAND OF **MANHATTAN**...

YOO HOO, **JOHNNY**?

IN HERE...OH, HEY **SHARON**. YOU'RE LOOKING GOOD. HOW ARE YOU?

FEELING MUCH, MUCH BETTER NOW, THANKS.

I JUST WANTED TO DROP BY AND SAY THANKS AGAIN FOR SAILING TO MY RESCUE.

I GOTTA ADMIT, WHEN **JULIE** FIRST INTRODUCED US, I NEVER EXPECTED TO HAVE NEED OF KNOWING YOU...IN AN OFFICIAL CAPACITY.

BUT I'D BE IN DEEPER-THAN-DEEP TROUBLE BY NOW IF YOU AN' THE REST OF THE FF HADN'T BAILED ME OUT...*

...ER, JOHNNY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

IT'S A LITTLE GAME CALLED "WAITING FOR THE EXTERMINATOR", SHAR. WHEN **NORM TOBIN** SOLD ME THIS LOFT TO CONVERT INTO MY NEW APARTMENT...

*SEE FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL #17 -- BOB.

"...HE NEGLECTED TO MENTION I'D HAVE... COMPANY."

USIN' YOUR POWER TO KILL ROACHES? THAT'S A BIT LIKE USIN' A *NUKE* TO KILL MICE, AIN'T IT?

JUST THINK OF IT AS MY LOWLY CONTRIBUTION TO A BATTLE THAT'S BEEN GOING ON FOR 300 MILLION YEARS.

BESIDES, IT'S FASTER, CLEANER, AND PROBABLY A LOT LESS CRUEL THAN USING POISONS...

...AND... AHEM ...MORE *FUN*, TOO.

ANYWAY, CAN I OFFER YOU A COKE OR SOMETHING? THE PREVIOUS TENANTS LEFT AN OLD BUT FUNCTIONAL ICE-BOX.

WELL, TO BE HONEST...

...I CAN THINK OF MUCH MORE ENJOYABLE WAYS TO SPEND AN AFTERNOON IN JUNE, CAN'T YOU?

SHAR-UMPH!

SH--SHARON! PLEASE! YOU'RE... A CUTE KID... BUT I'M NOT... I MEAN...

WELL, JULIE AND I... THAT IS...

DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME ON JULIE, JOHNNY. SHE'S...

HOLY...! THE *FF* EMERGENCY FLARE SIGNAL!

JOHNNY, WAIT! MAYBE IT ISN'T FOR YOU. I MEAN, MAYBE IT ISN'T A REAL EMERGENCY.

WE NEVER USE THAT FLARE UNLESS IT'S MAJOR-LEAGUE SERIOUS, SHARON.

I GOTTA *GO!*

FLAME ON!

JOHNNY!

OH... #%*&¢!

REED'S OVER AT AVENGERS MANSION, AND THAT LOOKS QUIET...

SUE'S HOUSE-HUNTING IN CONNECTICUT, SO IT MUST BE THE THING WHO'S SIGNALING.

BUT WHERE DID THAT FLARE...?

THERE!

THE RESIDUAL TRAIL OF THE SIGNAL IS ON THE QUEENS SIDE OF THE EAST RIVER.

A QUICK CHANGE OF DIRECTION AND THE HUMAN TORCH ACCELERATES OUT OF MANHATTAN TOWARDS...

HOLY COW!

WHAT IN BLAZES IS GOING ON HERE?

AT THAT MOMENT, SOME FIFTY MILES DUE NORTH AND BLISSFULLY IGNORANT OF THE DANGERS NOW CONFRONTING HER BROTHER AND HER DEAREST FRIEND...

I SHOULD BE BACK HOME... NO *BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING*... WITHIN TEN MINUTES AT THIS RATE.

I HOPE REED REMEMBERED TO POP THAT LASAGNA IN THE OVEN AS I ASKED HIM TO. I'M ABSOLUTELY FAMISHED!

BUT, AS DOMESTIC MATTERS OCCUPY HER THOUGHTS, SUSAN RICHARDS DOES NOT NOTICE THE CLOUD MASS BILLOWING OUT OF A CLEAR SKY BEHIND HER...

NOR DOES SHE SENSE THE GREAT, DARK SHIP HIDDEN WITHIN THE CLOUDS...

SILENT AS A GLIDING BIRD, THE LEVIATHAN DRAWS CLOSER, ITS STEALTH SO TOTAL THAT THE INVISIBLE GIRL REMAINS COMPLETELY UNAWARE...

...UNTIL IT IS TOO LATE...

WHAT IN THE NAME OF...?

ALTHOUGH SHE IS CAUGHT UNAWARES, SUE IS NOT UNPREPARED...

INSTINCTIVELY SHE WRAPS AN IMPENATRABLE, INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD ABOUT HERSELF...

I RECOGNIZE THIS STYLE OF TECHNOLOGY.

ONLY ONE MAN COULD HAVE BUILT THIS SHIP!

SIMULTANEOUSLY SHE RENDERS HER STREET CLOTHES INVISIBLE, AND THE UNIFORM SHE WEARS BENEATH REVEALS ITSELF...

DOCTOR DOOM!

EXCELLENT, SUSAN. YOU ARE AS INTELLIGENT AS YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL.

IT WILL TROUBLE ME A LITTLE TO ANNIHILATE YOU ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE ***FANTASTIC FOUR.***

SPARE ME YOUR HYPOCRISY, DOOM. THE INHIBITOR RAY YOU ONCE USED AGAINST US* HAS LONG SINCE WORN OFF.

THERE'S NOTHING NOW TO PREVENT ME FROM USING MY FORCE-FIELD TO CRACK OPEN YOUR ARMOR AND ***SQUASH*** YOU--IF IT REALLY IS YOU, AND NOT ONE OF YOUR ROBOT DOUBLES.

*SEE ISSUE #'S 246-247--BOB.

SUCH A GREETING! IS THAT HOW YOU ADDRESS YOUR BETTERS, WOMAN?

I HAD THOUGHT YOU A LADY. BUT IF YOU INSIST ON SPEAKING LIKE A KITCHEN WENCH...

...I'LL TREAT YOU AS ONE!

UNGH!

I... *FELT* THAT!

DOOM MUST BE USING SOME KIND OF CONCUSSIVE WEAPON THAT COUNTERS MY FORCE-FIELD.

FOR THE SAKE OF THE BABY I MUST FINISH THIS FIGHT BEFORE HE CAN KNOCK ME ABOUT TOO MUCH...

YET, WITH HIS STRANGE CODE OF HONOR I'M SHOCKED THAT HE WOULD STRIKE A WOMAN...

...*KILL* ONE, YES, BUT I THOUGHT HIM ABOVE SIMPLE BRUTALITY.

COSMIC-SPAWNED ENERGY IN HER CELLS SHAPES THE POWERS LOCKED WITHIN THEM, AND SUE LASHES OUT...

I KNEW IT! ANOTHER OF DOOM'S WRETCHED ROBOTS!

AND NOT A PARTICULARLY GOOD ONE, EITHER. MY FORCE-FIELD RAM TOOK ITS HEAD RIGHT OFF!

FORGIVE ME FOR NOT PERSONALLY WELCOMING YOU, SUSAN. THERE WERE MORE PRESSING MATTERS TO CONCERN ME.

REALLY, VON DOOM? YOU USED YOUR ROBOTS AGAINST US THE LAST TIME WE BATTLED. *

I'M INCLINED TO THINK YOU'VE SIMPLY BECOME ***AFRAID*** TO FACE ANY OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR YOURSELF.

*ISSUE # 246--BOB.

YOU KNOW ME BETTER THAN THAT, WOMAN. I SIMPLY FIND IT UNDIGNIFIED FOR A ***MONARCH*** TO ENGAGE IN SUCH MENIAL PHYSICALITY.

MY TRUE POWER LIES IN THE STRENGTH OF MY INTELLECT, AND HOW I USE IT TO GUIDE OTHERS.

A PRETTY SPEECH, DOOM, BUT LACKING CONVICTION. YOU STILL WON'T CONFRONT ME YOURSELF!

DO I HAVE TO COME AFTER YOU? DO I HAVE TO TAKE THIS WHOLE SHIP APART TO FIND YOU?

WONDERFUL! WONDERFUL! SUCH ***FIRE!*** SUCH UNGUESSED STRENGTH! I APPLAUD YOU, SUSAN RICHARDS. YOU HAVE BECOME A TRUE WARRIOR IN YOUR OWN RIGHT!

YOU COULD INDEED SMASH YOUR WAY THROUGH THIS VESSEL. YOU COULD CERTAINLY FIND YOUR WAY TO ME.

FOR THE FIRST TIME I AM EVEN COMPELLED TO CONSIDER THAT YOU, WHOM I ONCE THOUGHT ***WEAKEST*** OF THE FOUR, MIGHT ACTUALLY SURVIVE A BATTLE WITH VICTOR VON DOOM.

BUT, BEFORE WE TEST THAT HYPOTHESIS, LOOK BEHIND YOU.

WHAT KIND OF GAME ARE YOU PLAYING NOW, VON DOOM...?

...OH...

...NO...

BEHIND HER A BULKHEAD HAS SWUNG SILENTLY TO ONE SIDE. SUSAN STORM RICHARDS LOOKS OUT ON A SCENE MORE SUITED TO A WAR-ZONE.

TH-THAT'S JOHNNY DOWN THERE! AND *BEN!* BUT... WHO ARE THEY FIGHTING?

DOOM'S COLD, METALLIC VOICE IS ALMOST WITHOUT EMOTION NOW, YET IT SNAPS AGAINST HER LIKE A CAT-O'-NINE-TAILS. "FIGHTING? YOU MEAN WHO IS *DESTROYING* THEM, DO YOU NOT?

"LOOK CLOSELY, SUSAN. SURELY YOU RECOGNIZE AN OLD... FRIEND."

SHE SQUINTS THROUGH BILLOWING BLACK SMOKE, AND AN ICY CLAW SNATCHES AT HER HEART. "TYROS! TYROS! BUT HE'S *DEAD!*"

"NO, SUSAN. HE IS RESURRECTED, AND AT *MY* HAND. THE *POWER COSMIC* IS HIS ONCE MORE, THAT SAME POWER *I* ONCE STOLE FROM THE *SILVER SURFER!*

"AND THIS TIME NOTHING WILL PREVENT TYROS, MY UNWITTING SLAVE, FROM DESTROYING THE *FANTASTIC FOUR!*"

FISK'S POTATO CHIPS

AND SO, I CONFRONT YOU. IT IS THE TRUE VICTOR VON DOOM YOU SEE HERE NOW.

THE *CHOICE* THEN IS YOURS. ENGAGE ME NOW IN A BATTLE YOU *MIGHT* SURVIVE...

"...LEAVING YOUR LOVED ONES TO A BATTLE THEY CANNOT *POSSIBLY* SURVIVE...

"...OR GO NOW TO THEIR AID, REMEMBERING ALWAYS THAT TO DO SO IS TO *FLEE* DOOM, TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIM YOUR *MASTER!*"

HIS LOGIC IS FLAWED, WARPED BY HIS UNEQUALED *EGO*, YET THE CHOICE HE PRESENTS IS PLAIN AND TRUE...

...AND IN THE LAST ANALYSIS, NO CHOICE AT ALL...

CURSE YOU, DOOM!

BUT, AS THE INVISIBLE GIRL RIDES A HASTILY PROJECTED FORCE-FIELD RAMP INTO THE HEART OF BATTLE...

...WE MUST FOR A TIME DIVERT OUR ATTENTION, TURNING OUR GAZE UPWARDS, EVER UPWARDS, TO THE VERY EDGE OF SPACE...

...WHERE, NOT YET CAPTIVES OF EARTH'S IRRESISTIBLE GRAVITY, A SWARM OF METEORS FALL THROUGH THE UNENDING NIGHT...

...AND WITH THEM RIDES ONE WHO IS COMPLETELY AT HOME IN AIRLESS SPACE...

WHAT'S THIS?

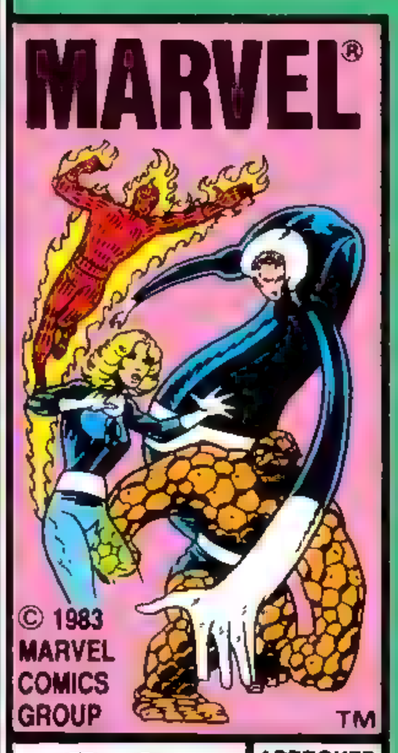
A MATTER TRANSFERRAL BEAM SIMILAR TO THOSE USED BY MANY WORLDS FOR INTERSTELLAR TRANSPORTATION...

IT STRUCK SOMEWHERE WITHIN THE HUMAN CITY CALLED **NEW YORK.** IT MIGHT WELL AFFECT THE FLEETING LIVES OF THOSE MORTALS I NAME MY *FRIENDS.*

BE THAT AS IT MAY, IT IS OF CERTAIN INTEREST TO...

...THE SILVER SURFER!

NEXT ISSUE: *DOCTOR DOOM! TYROS THE TERRIBLE! THE SILVER SURFER!* A STORY WE COULD ONLY CALL... **WHEN TITANS CLASH!** BE HERE!



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BEFORE WE PICK UP WHERE WE LEFT OFF LAST ISSUE--

HIGH ABOVE THE ARCTIC WASTES OF FAR NORTHERN CANADA A REGAL FIGURE CLEAVES THE FRIGID AIR, HEEDLESS OF TEMPERATURES THAT WOULD FREEZE ANOTHER MAN TO DEATH IN MERE MINUTES.

HYBRID EYES, EQUALLY AT HOME IN THE HIGH STRATOSPHERE OR THE DEEPEST OCEANS, SCAN THE LANDS BELOW, SEEKING DETAIL IN THE UNIFORMITY OF THE ICE FLOES.

HE IS **NAMOR**, PRINCE OF ATLANTIS, THE MIGHTY, SAVAGE **SUB-MARINER**, AND THIS DAY HE IS FAR FROM HOME, SEARCHING...

FROM HERE I DETECT NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY. THE WATER COLOR HAS NOT CHANGED, THE ICE FLOES FLOAT NEITHER HIGHER NOR LOWER.

YET SOMETHING IS SORELY AMISS IN THESE REGIONS, OR THE EVENTS OF THE LAST TWO DAYS WOULD NOT HAVE OCCURRED.

SO THINKING, THE MONARCH'S MIND PULLS BACK THE CURTAIN OF TIME, AND YESTERDAY COMES ALIVE FOR HIM AGAIN.

HE SEES ONCE MORE THE FRANTIC ARRIVAL OF AN ATLANTEAN BORDER GUARD AT A MORNING'S COUNCIL...

...HE STANDS AGAIN ALONE ON A DISTANT OUTPOST OF THE FABLED REALM, BEHOLDING WITH HIS OWN EYES THE APPROACH OF MANY HUNDREDS OF THE **BARBARIANS** OF THE NORTHERN REACHES.

NAMOR IS PREPARED FOR **BATTLE**...

...HE FINDS INSTEAD A PEOPLE SCARCELY RECOVERED FROM SOME TERRIBLE ORDEAL.

THE BARBARIANS HAVE COME NOT AS INVADERS, BUT AS **SUPPLICANTS**, BEGGING SANCTUARY IN THE NOBLE HALLS OF ATLANTIS.

THE BARBARIANS LACK THE WISDOM TO PROPERLY DESCRIBE WHAT HAS DRIVEN THEM FROM THEIR HOME WATERS--ABLE ONLY TO SAY THAT THOSE WATERS HAVE BECOME UNLIVABLE.

AND SO THE AVENGING SON SETS FORTH TO LEARN FOR HIMSELF WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED.

AN HOUR OR SO AGO HE TOOK AT LAST TO THE AIR, AND NOW...

I CAN TELL NOTHING FURTHER FROM ABOVE THE WATER...

...TIME I LOOKED BELOW!

FOR LONG MINUTES THE POWERFUL LIMBS OF THE HALF-BREED KING OF ATLANTIS PROPEL HIM, BUT...

THE REALMS OF THE BARBARIAN LORDS LIE ALL ABOUT ME...

YET I DETECT NOTHING WRONG. HAVE THE BARBARIANS *LIED*? IS THIS ALL PART OF SOME LARGER SCHEME TO INVADE ATLANTIS?

THEN...

GREAT NEPTUNE'S TRI-DENT! MY WRIST BANDS! THEY ARE *DISSOLVING!*

BUT... THERE IS NO AGENT IN THE WATERS WHICH MIGHT CAUSE SUCH A THING.

ALL IS AS IT SHOULD BE, AND YET...

OF A SUDDEN... I AM... WEAK. THE STRENGTH... DRAINS FROM MY BODY... WHAT IS...

WHAT...

...IS...

THE THOUGHT GOES UNCOMPLETED. DARKNESS OVERWHELMS HIM...

...AND THE KING OF THE SEAS SINKS TOWARDS THE FROZEN OCEAN FLOOR...

...BUT MORE ON HIS FATE LATER. AS FOR NOW--

--STAN LEE PRESENTS A BATTLE OF TRULY COSMIC PROPORTIONS!

WHEN TITANS CLASH!

THE STORY SO FAR: DOCTOR DOOM HAS AT LAST SUCCEEDED IN RECREATING ARTIFICIALLY THE POWER COSMIC HE ONCE TRIED UNSUCCESSFULLY TO STEAL FROM THE **SILVER SURFER.** USING THAT POWER, DOOM HAS RESURRECTED **TYROS THE TERRIBLE**, FALLEN HERALD OF **GALACTUS**, AND DISPATCHED HIM ON A MISSION TO DESTROY THE **FANTASTIC FOUR**, AND MOST ESPECIALLY THEIR LEADER, **REED RICHARDS**, DOOM'S GREATEST FOE. WHAT TYROS DOES NOT KNOW IS THAT HE HAS ONLY HOURS OF LIFE LEFT BEFORE THE AWESOME **POWER COSMIC** CONSUMES HIM. AND WHAT DOOM AND THE REST OF THE F.F. DO NOT KNOW IS THAT REED HAS **VANISHED!**

FOOLS! CRETINS! YOU PIT YOUR PUNY POWERS AGAINST TYROS? AGAINST THE MASTER OF ROCK AND EARTH?

UNGH! HE'S TOO POWERFUL FOR ME ALONE! *THING!* DO SOMETHING!

WADDAYA THINK I'M DOIN', HOTSHOT? PICKIN' POSIES? HEY, CHROME DOME, LOOK OVER HERE!

TASTY POPS

JOHN BYRNE | STORY AND ART
JIM NOVAK | LETTERS
GLYNIS WEIN | COLORS
BOB BUDIANSKY | EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER | TITAN

IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!

TOOA SPECK

KIT

AN

SUPER CLEEM

SUPER CLEEM

NOW JUST LIE THERE LIKE A GOOD L'IL SUPER-PUNK...

...AN' I'LL TRY TA MAKE THIS AS PAINLESS AS POSSIBLE!

IMBECILE! HAVE YOU NOT YET LEARNED THE EXTENT OF MY *POWER*? FOR AN INSTANT YOU MAY GAIN AN UPPER HAND, BUT IN THE END WILL TYROS *TRIUMPH!!*

BLAST IT, TH' SUCKER MIGHT BE RIGHT!

ME AN' TH' *TORCH* ARE AS TOUGH AS HIM ANY DAY, BUT HE CAN KEEP TOSSIN' ROCKS AT US UNTIL WE'RE TOO POOPED T' PANT...

...AN' DOIN' IT DON'T SEEM TA COST HIM *BEANS* IN ENERGY!

MAN-O-MAN. THIS IS ONE DAY I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN MY VITAMINS.

BUT I CAN'T JUST LIE HERE DOING MY IMPRESSION OF POTTING SOIL. *BEN* NEEDS MY HELP.

AND EVEN THOUGH I DON'T *NEED* TO SAY IT SINCE I'M ALREADY ABLAZE, I CAN USE THE EGO-BOOST OF MY BATTLE-CRY...

FLAME ON!

WHAT? THE STRIPLING AGAIN? WHY DO YOU NOT JUST LAY DOWN AND *DIE!*

IT WILL SAVE YOU A GREAT DEAL OF *PAIN!*

NOT AGAIN!

THE THING IS BURIED FOR THE NONCE. I CAN AFFORD A MOMENT TO DESTROY THE *HUMAN TORCH!*

BUT I DO NOT NEED TO USE MY EARTHEN POWER FOR THAT. I NEED ONLY MY STRENGTH...

...MY STRENGTH, AND THIS WATER PIPE UNCOVERED BY OUR BATTLE.

DROWN, FLAMING ONE!

DROWN!

BUT...

WHAT? SOMETHING STOPS THE WATER STREAM...?

NOT SOMETHING, TYROS. SOMEONE. NAMELY *ME*.

THE INVISIBLE GIRL! BUT...I DID NOT KNOW YOU COULD *FLY*...?

NOT FLIGHT, TYROS. JUST RIDING ONE OF MY *INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELDS*. YOU REMEMBER THEM, DON'T YOU? THEY WORK SOMETHING LIKE *THIS!*

A... BUBBLE... FORMING AROUND MY HEAD... CUTTING OFF MY AIR...

I CAN'T *BREATHE*... BUT I CAN DO...

...*THIS!*

RUMBLE

NO!

HA HA HA HA! FOOLS! FOOLS AND WEAKLINGS! THIS IS ALMOST *TOO* EASY!

WELL, IT AIN'T GONNA BE FER LONG, BUTTER-CUP! I'D BE HAPPY TA PLAY WITH YA ALL DAY...

...BUT WE'VE ALREADY WRECKED A SUPER-MARKET, AN' IT'S JUST DUMB *LUCK* NO CIVILIANS GOT KILLED.

SO I GOTTA END THIS FIGHT FAST!

WHAT IN...?!

WAY TO GO BENJAMIN!

NOW LET'S PUT TYROS IN LA-LA LAND BEFORE ANY OF OUR AUDIENCE GETS TOO CLOSE.

I HEAR YA TALKIN', KIDDO!

IT'S NO USE! EVEN WITH THEIR COMBINED POWERS ALL *JOHNNY* AND BEN CAN DO IS PROLONG THE BATTLE.

WE MUST BRING IT TO AN *END!*

WE NEED *REED!*

SECONDS LATER, A FAMILIAR FLARE SIGNAL LIGHTS THE AFTERNOON SKY OVER *QUEENS.*

AND, IN A GREAT SHIP, HIDDEN BY ROLLING CLOUDS, FAR ABOVE THE BURSTING FLARE...

EXCELLENT. EXCELLENT. ALL GOES EXACTLY ACCORDING TO PLAN. MY INSTRUMENTS SHOW TYROS HAS LESS THAN FORTY-EIGHT MINUTES BEFORE THE POWER COSMIC WILL BEGIN TO OVERWHELM HIM.

GIVEN THE PRESENT CONFIGURATIONS OF THE BATTLE, BY THAT TIME HE SHOULD HAVE SUBJUGATED THESE THREE MEMBERS OF THE ACCURSED FOURSOME, JUST IN TIME FOR REED RICHARDS TO ARRIVE.

THEN DOCTOR DOOM WILL TAKE A HAND, AND MY OLD AND HATED ENEMY WILL BE FOREVER *DESTROYED!*

BUT AS LONG MINUTES TICK AGONIZINGLY BY...

WHERE IS RICHARDS? HE MUST COME! HE MUST *SEE* THE HUMILIATION AND DESTRUCTION OF HIS LOVED ONES BEFORE HE, HIMSELF, PERISHES.

SOMETHING HAS GONE *WRONG*. HE IS NOT COMING.

SECONDS LATER ON THE STREET BELOW...

HOLY COW, IT'S DOCTOR DOOM!

LOOK OUT, MAN! I'M GONE!

THE FF HAVE HAD IT FER SURE NOW!

NAH, THEY'LL BEAT HIM EASY!

ONE SIDE, PEASANTS! NONE MAY BLOCK THE PASSAGE OF THE LORD OF *LATVERIA!*

IT'S DOC DOOM! HE'S BEHIND ALL THIS!

WHO'S HE THINK HE IS, ORDERIN' US AROUND?

IT'S *DOOM!*

YOU GONNA ARGUE WITH HIM, PAL?

SHOP-RITE

FOXY LADY

HOLD, TYROS! THE BATTLE IS ENDED! WE WILL NOT DESTROY THE FANTASTIC FOUR WITHOUT REED RICHARDS PRESENT!

DO NOT ORDER ME, HUMAN. TYROS IS NOT YOURS TO COMMAND!

THEN TYROS IS DEAD!

YEOW!

YOU DARE! YOU DARE ATTACK TYROS THE TERRIBLE? YOU DARE ATTACK A WIELDER OF THE POWER COSMIC?!

YOU ARE A FOOL, DOOM! A GREATER FOOL THAN I HAD EVEN IMAGINED. THE GREATEST FOOL IN ALL THE WORLD!

AND THE TIME HAS COME FOR YOU TO PAY FOR YOUR FOLLY!

DOOM'S IN ON THIS, TOO? WHAT IS THIS, NATIONAL TROMP THE FF WEEK?

THIS WHOLE ATTACK WAS DOOM'S PLAN, BEN. HE'S THE ONE WHO BROUGHT TYROS BACK!

YEAH? WELL THEM TWO DON'T LOOK NONE TOO BUDDY-BUDDY TA ME!

INDEED, DOOM IS UNLEASHING THE FULL MIGHT OF HIS ARMORED BATTLE SUIT AGAINST HIS ERSTWHILE "PARTNER".

IGNORANT ALIEN SAVAGE! I AM *DOOM!* THIS IS MY PLAN! MY VICTORY! WITHOUT THE DEGRADATION OF REED RICHARDS IT WOULD MEAN *NOTHING!*

UNFH!

NO, DOOM, THIS BATTLE DOES NOT BELONG TO YOU. THIS TRIUMPH IS NOT YOURS TO TAKE OR LEAVE AT WILL. THE FANTASTIC FOUR BETRAYED ME! *

THEIR LIVES ARE MINE TO GRIND AWAY TO DUST!

*SEE ISSUE #'S 242, 243, AND 244 --BOB.

MINE!

YEARRGH!

HA HA HA HA! YOU ARE FINISHED, DOOM! THE POWER COSMIC HAS *FUSED* YOUR ARMOR, AND THUS SHALL YOU REMAIN, A *MONUMENT* TO YOUR OWN STUPIDITY, UNTIL IT PLEASES ME TO GRANT YOU THE RELEASE OF *DEATH!*

AND NOW SHALL I FINISH WITH THE FANTASTIC FOUR, FOR THERE REMAINS NO ONE IN ALL THE WORLD WHO CAN STOP ME!

NO ONE, FELLOW HERALD?

THEN "NO ONE" RIDES A SHINING SILVER *BOARD!*

THE AIR SCREAMS ABOUT HIS ARGENT FORM, AS HE FLASHES DOWN FROM THE VERY EDGE OF SPACE.

TO THE UNHUMAN EYES OF TYROS THE POWER COSMIC FAIRLY BRISTLES AROUND HIM, AND THE WOULD-BE DESTROYER FEELS A SINGLE DROP OF ACID FEAR SPLASH AGAINST HIS HEART.

*THE SILVER SURFER!**

**THE SURFER'S ATTENTION WAS DRAWN TO NEW YORK CITY WHEN HE SAW, FROM HIS VANTAGE POINT AT THE EDGE OF THE EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE, A MATTER TRANSFERRAL BEAM HEADING TOWARD THAT LOCALE LAST ISSUE -- BOB.*

AYE, TYROS, AND KNOW YOU THAT TO ATTACK THOSE THE SURFER NAMES AS *FRIENDS* IS TO ATTACK THE SURFER HIMSELF!

AND TO ATTACK THE SURFER IS FATUITY INDEED!

ARGH!!

I KNOW YOU HAVE BOASTED YOURSELF TO BE THE MOST POWERFUL HERALD OF OUR FORMER MASTER, TYROS...

...LET US NOW PUT THAT BOAST TO THE *TEST!*

THOUGH I FEAR FOR *YOU* IT WILL BE A TEST UNTO *DESTRUCTION!*

YOU ARE POWERFUL INDEED, *NORRIN RADD!* MORE POWERFUL PERHAPS THAN I HAD EVER SUSPECTED!

BUT I DO NOT *BOAST* TO SAY I AM MOST POWERFUL OF THE HERALDS OF *GALACTUS!*

FOR THAT IS WHAT I *AM!*

RACING ACROSS THE SHATTERED PARKING LOT, TYROS SNATCHES UP A MOST PRECIOUS PRIZE...

NOW I HAVE IT! I HAVE BUT TO LEARN THE SECRET OF ITS *FLIGHT* AND THE STARS WILL ONCE AGAIN BE MINE!

BUT...

DAGRIM'S BONES!

IT LEAPS SKYWARD OF ITS OWN VOLITION!

NO, TYROS OF LANLAK. THE SILVER BOARD DOES NO MORE THAN WHAT IT IS COMMANDED TO DO SO BY ITS ONE TRUE MASTER!

SUCH IS THE WILL OF *GALACTUS!*

AND, AS THE BATTLE CLIMBS ONCE AGAIN TOWARDS THE CLOUDS...

THIS IS A CONTINGENCY I HAD NOT CALCULATED.

IT WAS STUPID OF ME TO CONFRONT TYROS *MYSELF*, INSTEAD OF USING A *ROBOT*.

NOW, WITH MY ARMOR FUSED, I AM UNABLE TO ACTIVATE MY ESCAPE MECHANISMS.

BUT I CANNOT SIMPLY STAND HERE. EVEN IN THIS CONDITION DOCTOR DOOM IS NOT *HELPLESS*.

THERE MUST BE A WAY TO EXTRICATE MYSELF FROM THIS PREDICAMENT.

AND THERE *IS!* BUT IT IS SOMETHING I HAVE NOT ATTEMPTED FOR MANY YEARS.

THE CONDITIONS ARE FAR FROM *IDEAL*, BUT IT IS MY ONE CHANCE! I MUST ATTEMPT IT!

AND AS VICTOR VON DOOM TURNS HIS AWESOME INTELLECT ALONG STRANGE PATHS...

WHY IS IT TAKING THE FANTASTIC FOUR SO LONG TO STOP THESE AWFUL PEOPLE? FROM ALL I'VE READ I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THEY WERE POWERFUL ENOUGH...

WHY, THEY'VE BEATEN THAT NASTY DOCTOR DOOM *DOZENS* OF TIMES BEFORE. I...

BE SILENT, OLD WOMAN! I HAVE NO TIME TO LISTEN TO YOUR RIDICULOUS PRATTLING!

HEY, DOWNER! WHAT SET HIM OFF, GRANNY?

I DONT THINK ANYTHING "SET HIM OFF!" I THINK IT'S JUST ANOTHER SIGN OF THE AWFUL MANNERS YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE NOWADAYS!

IF MY *NEPHEW* WERE HERE, HE'D GIVE HIM A PIECE OF HIS MIND!

AND I AM *NOT* YOUR GRANNY!

AND FAR, FAR ABOVE...

...RAGES A BATTLE SUCH AS THE PLANET EARTH HAS NEVER BEFORE SEEN--

TWO WIELDERS OF THE **POWER COSMIC**, THE PRIMAL LIVING ENERGY OF THE UNIVERSE ITSELF, LOCKED IN BRUTAL, HAND-TO-HAND-COMBAT.

WHAT PLUMMETS BACK TO EARTH RESEMBLES LITTLE THE SHAPE OF TWO MEN.

THE UNBRIDLED FORCES OF **CREATION** FLASH AND CRACK ACROSS THE AFTERNOON SKY.

A SKY TO WHICH THE COMBATANTS ONCE AGAIN RETURN...

AND AT THE HEART OF THAT UNIVERSAL FIRE...

TYROS!

BUT EVEN AS THE STARTLED SURFER GASPS HIS OPPONENT'S NAME HE REALIZES TYROS IS NO LONGER TRULY THERE...

WHAT GRAPPLES WITH WITH HIM NOW IS A LIVING EXTENSION OF THE POWER COSMIC...

BUT LIVING NOT FOR LONG, AS THE FIREBALL PLUNGES EARTHWARD ONCE AGAIN...

AND THE MORTAL FORM OF THE CREATURE ONCE CALLED TYROS BOILS AWAY.

AND AN ARMORED FIGURE SCREAMS...

HOLY CATS! I AIN'T NEVER SEEN AN EXPLOSION LIKE *THIS* BEFORE.

IT'S LIKE IT'S ALMOST *ALIVE!*

GET CLEAR, BOTH OF YOU!

I'VE SURROUNDED IT WITH AN INVISIBLE FORCE FIELD, BUT IT'S SO POWERFUL...

PUSHING ME BACK...

SIS...?

SUZIE!

PROPELLED BY THE PRESSURE OF THE BLAST AGAINST HER FORCE-FIELD, SUSAN STORM RICHARDS FAIRLY FLIES ACROSS THE PARKING LOT.

EVEN TAKEN THUS BY SURPRISE, HER LITHE FORM IS GRACEFUL IN MOTION.

THE SAME CANNOT BE SAID FOR HER **STOPPING**...

SIS! SIS, ARE YOU OKAY?

THE BABY...?

WE'RE *FINE*, JOHNNY.

BUT...

...WHAT ABOUT THE *SILVER SURFER*?

I DUNNO, SUE. IT DON'T LOOK LIKE *ANYBODY'S* COMIN' UP OUTTA THIS MESS...

WAIT A SEC...

STRUGGLING, STRAINING, THE BATTERED FIGURE RISES FROM THE BUBBLING CAULDRON.

IT... WOULD SEEM... I HAVE ...*WON*...

WOW, GLINTY, AM I EVER GLAD TA SEE YOU ALL IN ONE PIECE. BUT, TYROS...?

AN' *DOOM*??

OF DOOM I CANNOT SAY. BUT TYROS IS *GONE*, ULTIMATELY CONSUMED BY THE *POWER COSMIC*.

AND AS FOR DOCTOR DOOM...

SIS, BE CAREFUL!

DON'T WORRY, JOHNNY. I DON'T THINK I HAVE ANYTHING TO FEAR FROM DOOM ANYMORE!

I DON'T THINK ANY OF US NEED FEAR HIM EVER AGAIN!

DOOM'S MASK! THE BLAST MUST HAVE BLOWN IT RIGHT OFF!

AND IF THE BLAST COULD SHATTER HIS ARMOR THEN... DOOM COULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED. THE GREATEST EVIL THE WORLD HAS EVER FACED IS... *DEAD!*

AN' GOOD RIDDANCE, SEZ I. LET'S BLOW THIS JOINT!

LEAVING WILL NOT PROVE QUITE SO EASY, THE CONSEQUENCES OF A MAJOR BATTLE IN THE MIDDLE OF A HIGHLY POPULATED AREA BEING MANY. THERE ARE ACCOUNTS BOTH ECONOMIC AND EMOTIONAL THAT WILL TAKE YEARS TO SETTLE. WE NEED NOT CONCERN OURSELVES WITH SUCH MATTERS FOR THE PRESENT, HOWEVER.

4

WE TURN OUR ATTENTION INSTEAD A FEW HOURS INTO THE FUTURE...

...AS DUSK CREEPS INTO THE GLEAMING CANYONS OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST CITY, AND SUNSET PINKS THE TOPS OF THE MIGHTY SKYSCRAPERS.

AND, ON THE THIRTY-SECOND FLOOR OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S FAR-FAMED **BAXTER BUILDING** HEADQUARTERS...

TAKE IT EASY NOW, ***NORRIN RADD.*** YOU'RE STILL VERY WEAK.

DO NOT DISTRESS YOURSELF, SUSAN. I SHALL... RECOVER.

I'M SURE YOU WILL, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULDN'T ***REST*** AFTER YOUR BATTLE.

WAIT HERE IN THE INFIRMARY, AND I'LL SEE IF ***REED*** IS BACK FROM AVENGERS MANSION.

BUT AS THE BEAUTIFUL INVISIBLE GIRL MOVES QUICKLY THROUGH THE MANY LEVELS OF THE TOWER COMPLEX A STRANGE EMPTINESS TOUCHES HER...

THIS IS VERY ODD.

I WISH JOHNNY AND BEN HADN'T GONE OFF TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN AFFAIRS.

I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING SOMETHING IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN. SOMETHING ***AWFUL!***

FINALLY, ON THE THIRTY-FIRST STORY RESIDENTIAL LEVEL...

I DON'T LIKE THE FEEL OF THIS AT ALL.

REED WASN'T IN ANY OF THE LABS UPSTAIRS. IN FACT THE EXPERIMENTS HE WAS WORKING ON WHEN I WENT OUT THIS MORNING...

... LOOK EXACTLY AS THEY DID THEN. HE SAID HE WAS GOING OVER TO AVENGERS MANSION AT *TEN*...

...BUT HE WAS CERTAIN HE'D BE BACK IN TIME TO START DINNER COOKING AT THREE.

I'M SURE HE DIDN'T *FORGET*. EVEN IF HE GOT TIED UP AT THE MANSION...

...HE'D HAVE WHIPPED UP SOME *WIDGET* TO COME AND TURN ON THE OVEN.

BUT, NO, THE LASAGNA I LEFT IS STONE COLD.

I'D BETTER GIVE THE AVENGERS A QUICK CALL...

BUT BEFORE A PHONE CAN BE REACHED...

S... SUSAN...

OH MY!

NAMOR!

SUSAN RICHARDS... I HAVE NEED OF YOU!

TO BE CONTINUED! BUT NOT IN THE PAGES OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR! DON'T MISS ALPHA FLIGHT #4, NOW ON SALE!

NEXT ISSUE: A MYSTERY UNRAVELS, A TERRIBLE TRUTH IS REVEALED!

THE SEARCH FOR REED RICHARDS!

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ALPHA FLIGHT™

1983

RESOLUTIONS!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: JOHN BYRNE WRITER - ARTIST * RICK PARKER LETTERER * ANDY YANCHUS COLORIST * DENNY O'NEIL EDITOR * JIM SHOOTER RESOLVED

EXPLAIN IT TO ME AGAIN, *NAMOR.*

WHY AM I CHASING ALL OVER THE *NORTH POLE* WITH YOU WHEN I SHOULD BE HOME TRYING TO CONTACT MY *HUSBAND*, AND TENDING TO THE *SILVER SURFER?*

*ICY WINDS WHIP PAST HER AT MORE THAN FORTY MILES AN HOUR. IT IS SUMMER IN THE ARCTIC, BUT EVEN THROUGH HER INSULATED COSTUME THE COLD STABS AT **SUSAN STORM RICHARDS**, THE **INVISIBLE GIRL**.**

** NO, READERS, JOHN HASN'T CONFUSED ALPHA FLIGHT WITH THE FANTASTIC FOUR. BEAR WITH US -- Denny.*

YOU ARE HERE FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT I *ASKED* YOU TO BE HERE, SUSAN.

AND YOU KNOW THAT THE *SUB-MARINER* DOES NOT CRAVE THE AID OF ANY HUMAN -- NOT EVEN YOU -- UNLESS THE NEED IS DIRE INDEED.

NOW, BE ALERT. WE ARE NEARING THE AREA OF ICE-CAP OVER THOSE WATERS I FOUND *MOST* INHOS-PITABLE...

ARE YOU CERTAIN, NAMOR? HOW INFALLIBLE IS YOUR NAVIGATION SENSE WHEN YOU ARE OUT OF WATER?

ENOUGH THAT I AM CERTAIN WHATEVER *EVILS* DROVE SOUTH THE *BARBARIAN HORDES** LIE NEAR HERE, SOMEWHERE IN THE *ICE*.

I'LL TAKE YOUR WORD FOR IT. BUT HOW CAN YOU TELL ONE PATCH OF ICE FROM ANOTHER?

WAIT! YOU'RE RIGHT, NAMOR! MY FAN-TASTICAR'S SENSORS ARE PICKING UP SOMETHING BENEATH THE ICE-CAP.

SOMETHING *INCREDIBLE!*

* SEE *FANTASTIC FOUR* #260 -- D. O'NEIL.

... BUT SOMETHING I CAN'T SEEM TO GET A CLEAR *FIX* ON. OH... IF ONLY *REED* WERE HERE. HE'D BE ABLE TO MODIFY THE SCANNER, GET PERFECT RESOLUTION...

BUT YOUR HUSBAND IS *NOT* WITH US. DO THE BEST YOU CAN, SUSAN.

YOUR BEST HAS EVER BEEN MORE THAN SUFFICIENT.

"FLATTERER," SUSAN SMILES, AS HER SLIM FINGERS COAX THE CONTROLS.

THEN...

THERE-- I'M AFRAID THAT'S THE BEST WE CAN GET, NAMOR.

IT IS ENOUGH. *FANTASTIC!* A *COMPLEX* OF SOME KIND, A TECHNOLOGICAL STRUCTURE BENEATH THE ICE, *INSIDE* THE ICE. VAST...

BUT, WHY DO THE EDGES SEEM TO *BLUR,* AS IF THERE IS NO SHARP DEFINITION BETWEEN METAL AND ICE?

THAT MAY BE JUST THE LACK OF CLEAR... WAIT. WAIT A MOMENT...

ENERGY READING...!

THREE AND ONE HALF MILES AWAY, AT JUST THAT MOMENT...

RRR?!

THE GREAT WHITE BEAR TURNS TOWARD THE BLAST, AND UNEXPECTED INTELLIGENCE SHINES IN ITS CLEAR EYES.

IT STANDS BEFORE GIANT, BROKEN DOORS, BURIED IN THE ICE AND SNOW, AND ITS ANIMAL SENSES, KEENER FAR THAN HUMAN, SCAN THE AREA.

IT WONDERS, IN ITS SLOW, BEAR WAY, IF THIS DISTANT EXPLOSION IS IN SOME WAY CONNECTED TO THE WRECKAGE IT FOUND EARLIER.

WHEN IT WAS NOT A BEAR.

AND IT RESOLVES IN THAT INSTANT THAT THE TIME HAS COME TO BE A BEAR NO LONGER.

MYSTIC ENERGIES SWIRL AND FLOW. BEAR FLESH GROWS SOFT, SLIPPING AND SLIDING AGAINST NO-LONGER-SOLID BONE.

SNOWBIRD RETURNS.

THERE IS MUCH WRONG HERE--GREAT EVIL IN THIS PLACE. ANCIENT EVIL.

THAT EXPLOSION OCCURRED NOT FAR FROM THE WRECKED *ALPHA FLIGHT* SKYSHIP I FOUND NOT AN HOUR AGO... IT IS LOGICAL TO ASSUME THE TWO EVENTS ARE IN SOME WAY CONNECTED. BUT IT IS NOT NOW THE TIME TO INVESTIGATE EITHER.

I SENSE MY FELLOW MEMBERS OF ALPHA ARE SOMEWHERE AHEAD.

AND THOUGH THE EVIL IN THIS PLACE THREATENS TO SMOTHER MY MYSTICAL SENSES AND OVERWHELM ME...

...I MUST JOIN THEM.

SEVERAL LEVELS BELOW...

I THINK EXPLANATIONS ARE IN ORDER, JIMMY-BOY. WHAT DO YOU MEAN *AURORA* HAS RETREATED INTO HER *JEANNE-MARIE* PERSONA?

AREN'T THEY THE SAME PERSONA?

NOT EXACTLY, *SASQUATCH*. BUT WE'VE NO TIME TO WASTE TALKING...

THEN MAKE TIME. WE'RE NOT GOING ANY-WHERE UNTIL I UNDER-STAND MORE FULLY WHAT'S WRONG HERE.

I'VE KNOWN AURORA EVER SINCE YOU INDUCTED ME INTO *ALPHA FLIGHT*, AND THERE'S NEVER BEEN SO MUCH AS A HINT SHE WAS ANYTHING BUT A FREE-SPIRITED MAM'SELLE.

NOW SHE'S TURNED INTO THE COMPLETE OPPOSITE--ALMOST IN FRONT OF MY EYES.

ALL RIGHT, WALT, I'LL EXPLAIN. BUT IT'S GOT TO BE THE READER'S DIGEST VERSION.

JEANNE-MARIE IS A CLASSIC PARANOID, WHAT PEOPLE CALL A *SPLIT PERSONALITY*. SHE THINKS OF HER *AURORA* IDENTITY AS SOMEONE ELSE... SOMEONE SHE *HATES*.

AND THIS IS THE KIND OF SOLID, STABLE MATERIAL YOU CONSIDER SUITABLE FOR SUPER HEROING?

NO. WHEN I FIRST MET HER SHE WAS IN HER AURORA PERSONA. I DIDN'T LEARN THE OTHER SIDE OF HER UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE.

NOW THE TRAP WE JUST RESCUED HER FROM SEEMS TO HAVE FORCED SOME KIND OF SPONTANE-OUS REGRESSION, AND *JEANNE-MARIE* IS DOMI-NANT AGAIN!

OOOH-- MA TÊTE! WHAT... IS... 'APPEN?

EASY, EASY. YOU'RE SAFE NOW, AURORA. YOU CAN...

AURORA! DO NOT CALL ME ZAT NAME! TAKE YOUR FILTHY PAWS OFF!

I MUS' GET AWAY! AWAY FROM AURORA!

OH, BLAST! *JEANNE-MARIE!*

I'M SORRY!

WAIT!

IDIOT! IDIOT! IDIOT! EVEN AFTER EXPLAINING HER PROBLEM TO YOU I INSTINCTIVELY CALLED HER "AURORA". EXACTLY THE ***WRONG*** THING TO DO.

I'VE GOT TO GET AFTER HER AND...

NO...

YOU SAID HER BROTHER ***NORTHSTAR*** COULD BRING HER OUT OF IT. YOU LOOK FOR HIM!

I'VE... KNOWN HER BETTER THAN YOU.

WAIT... OH, WALT, YOU DON'T MEAN...

ASK ME NO QUESTIONS, AND I'LL TELL YOU NO LIES, JIMMY. JUST GET AFTER NORTHSTAR.

*THUS, WITH A TROUBLED BACKWARD GLANCE, THE MAN CALLED **GUARDIAN** LAUNCHES HIMSELF DEEPER INTO THE SURROUNDING COMPLEX...*

...AS THE MAN-MONSTER KNOWN AS SASQUATCH HEADS OFF IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.

AND AS HE MOVES HIS LONG, LOPING GAIT CHANGES, BALANCE SHIFTING, PROPORTIONS ALTERING...

I MAY BE ABLE TO REACH THROUGH JEANNE-MARIE TO AURORA...

UNTIL...

BUT I THINK I'LL FARE BETTER AS PLAIN OL' ***WALTER LANGOWSKI.***

ASSUMING I CAN ***FIND*** HER WITHOUT MY BLASTED ***GLASSES!***

AND, JUST TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, THESE CORRIDORS AREN'T CONSTANT. SOMEHOW, THEY KEEP SHIFTING, ALTERING DIRECTION, SIZE--EVERYTHING.

AS IF THIS WHOLE PLACE IS SOME KIND OF LIVING ORGANISM.

AND IF I DON'T FIND AURORA IN SHORT ORDER, WE'LL *BOTH* BE HOPELESSLY LOST!

AH, THERE YOU ARE! DON'T BE AFRAID, JEANNE MARIE, YOU REMEMBER ME, DON'T YOU? I'D NEVER HURT YOU, WOULD I?

ZAT IS NOT FOR ME TO SAY, M'SIEUR. I AM NOT IN ZE 'ABIT OF ASSOCIATING WIZ *NAKED MEN!*

INCREDIBLE! A TOTALLY SEPARATE PERSONALITY! EVEN HER *ACCENT* HAS CHANGED, AS IF SHE'S HAVING TROUBLE WITH ENGLISH.

I'M HARDLY NAKED, JEANNE-MARIE, IN FACT THERE ARE BEACHES IN THIS COUNTRY WHERE I'D BE CONSIDERED OVERDRESSED. NOW PLEASE COME WITH ME. WE MUST GET BACK TO THE OTHERS.

DO NOT TOUCH ME. I DON' WANT TO SEE ZE "OTHEIRS." I WANT TO KNOW WAIR I AM--AND WHY I AM 'ERE.

JEANNE-MARIE... PLEASE, YOU MUST LISTEN TO ME...

HIS WORDS ARE CALM, HIS DEEP VOICE SLOW AND SOOTHING. WHEN HE REACHES OUT HIS HAND HIS TOUCH IS GENTLE, HARDLY THREATENING.

HE SPEAKS OF MOMENTS THEY HAVE SHARED--A NIGHT IN NEW YORK, WEEKS BEFORE.

HE SPEAKS OF INTIMACY, TWO PEOPLE SHARING SOMETHING MORE THAN FRIENDSHIP, IF NOT ENTIRELY LOVE.

HIS WORDS ARE KIND, CALMING, EVOKING IN HER NOT AT ALL THE DISGUST SHE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED OF HERSELF.

SLOWLY, O-SO-SLOWLY, SHE REMEMBERS...

BUT SHE REMEMBERS AS JEANNE-MARIE.

ANIMAL!

BLAST!

OBVIOUSLY, THIS ISN'T GOING TO BE AS EASY AS I'D HOPED.

MEANWHILE...

THIS IS POINTLESS.

I HAVE RACED THROUGH WHAT MUST BE FIVE HUNDRED MILES OF CORRIDORS WITHOUT A SIGN OF AURORA.*

*THEY WERE SEPARATED LAST ISSUE-- DEN.

AND THESE WRETCHED HALLS NEVER LOOK THE SAME TWICE. EVEN THOUGH I'M SURE I'VE RETRACED MY PATH SEVERAL TIMES.

FACE FACTS, *JEAN-PAUL*, YOU ARE VERY, VERY LOST...

WELCOME, *NORTHSTAR*. I WAS BEGINNING TO THINK YOU'D NEVER GET HERE.

GUARDIAN! YOU FOLLOWED ME HERE? C'EST IMPOSSIBLE!

NOT ENTIRELY. I *CHEATED*.

I USED THE *CYBERNETIC CIRCUITRY* IN MY SUPER-SUIT TO TAP INTO THE INTERNAL SYSTEMS OF THIS COMPLEX. IT "SPEAKS" SOME INCOMPREHENSIBLE GOBBLEDEEGOOK, BUT I *WAS* ABLE TO PINPOINT ALL OUR LOCATIONS, AND FIND *YOU.*

ALL OF US? THEN YOU KNOW WHERE MY SISTER IS? YOU CAN HELP ME FIND HER?

I COULD, BUT I THINK THERE ARE MORE PRESSING MATTERS FOR US TO ATTEND TO JUST NOW, NORTHSTAR.

AURORA IS SAFE WITH SASQUATCH RIGHT NOW, BUT UNLESS WE ACT SHE WON'T BE SAFE FOR LONG. NONE OF US WILL UNLESS WE MOVE QUICKLY.

YOU SPEAK IN RIDDLES, GUARDIAN. WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

I'M TALKING ABOUT WHAT I THINK I'VE DISCOVERED TO BE THE PURPOSE OF THIS COMPLEX. AND, UNLESS WE *SHUT IT DOWN...*

...IT WILL MEAN THE *EXTERMINATION* OF *ALL LIFE ON EARTH!*

SEVERAL MINUTES EARLIER...

THAT WAS ALMOST TOO CLOSE, *SUE...*

DON'T QUIBBLE ABOUT TIMING, NAMOR. THAT RAY MAY HAVE DESTROYED THE FANTASTICAR...

...BUT I WAS ABLE TO THROW AN INVISIBLE FORCE FIELD AROUND US, AND SHIELD US FROM THE BLAST.

INDEED. DROP THE FIELD NOW, SUSAN, SO THAT WE MAY *LAND* PROPERLY.

HMM. IT IS AS I THOUGHT. THE EVIL THAT HAS INFECTED THE WATERS OF THIS REGION ALSO CORRUPTS THE ICE AND SNOW.

YOU'RE RIGHT. I CAN... FEEL SOMETHING WRONG. SOMETHING *MISSING* IN THE ICE...

WE MUST DISCOVER WHAT IT IS. STAND BACK, SUSAN. AS AERIAL APPROACH DID US NO GOOD, WE MUST GET...

UNDER THE ICE!

QUICKLY NOW, SUSAN. WE MUST FIND THE COMPLEX YOU SCANNED, AND GAIN EGRESS BEFORE I AM AGAIN OVERCOME BY THESE POISONED WATERS.

DO WE DARE RISK IT, NAMOR? IF YOU SHOULD SUCCUMB...

...WELL, FORGIVE MY SLIGHTLY SELFISH ATTITUDE, BUT THAT WOULD LEAVE ME IN, ER, HOT WATER...

THEN, IF YOU WORSHIP ANY GODS, SUSAN, I SUGGEST YOU OFFER UP A *PRAYER* TO THEM.

WE ARE COMMITTED.

FOR SEVERAL LONG MINUTES, THE TWO TRAVEL THROUGH ICY DARKNESS, LIKE EXPLORERS, IN SOME UNGUESSED DEPTH OF STARLESS SPACE...

THEN...

I... GROW STEADILY WEAKER, SUSAN. I FEAR I... MAY HAVE... FAILED YOU...

NAMOR, NO! LOOK!

NEPTUNE'S TRIDENT! IT IS BIGGER EVEN THAN I'D *IMAGINED!*

WITHIN SECONDS...

FANTASTIC! THIS COMPLEX MUST SOMEHOW BE *FEEDING* ON THE WATERS, DRAWING VITAL ELEMENTS OUT OF THEM, RENDERING THEM *DEADLY* TO MEMBERS OF MY RACE.

I THINK YOU MAY BE RIGHT, NAMOR. EVERYTHING ABOUT THIS PLACE SUGGESTS A LIVING THING-- A *GROWING* THING.

WE'VE GOT TO DISCOVER WHO'S BEHIND THIS PLACE, AND WHAT ITS PURPOSE IS...

THUS...

NOT SO FAST, IF YOU PLEASE, SUSAN. IT IS MOST... UNNERVING TO BE RENDERED *INVISIBLE!*

TRY NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT, NAMOR. JUST MOVE NATURALLY. THAT'S WHAT I DO.

WE NEED MY INVISIBILITY POWER TO GET INTO THIS COMPLEX WITHOUT-- I HOPE-- BEING DETECTED.

AND, SOME FORTY MINUTES LATER...

YOU CONTINUE TO RESIST THE PROBES, LITTLE *MARRINA*. EVEN THOUGH I HAVE TOLD YOU TO DO SO IS USELESS.

WHY... WHY DO YOU TORTURE ME? YOU TOLD ME THIS *SHIP* DID THE SAME TO YOU, FORTY THOUSAND YEARS AGO...

WHY DO YOU INFLICT SUCH AGONY ON ANOTHER LIVING BEING?

" SHIP...?"

MARRINA, I HAVE TOLD YOU WHO I AM, HOW I CAME TO BE *MASTER* OF THIS, YOUR SHIP.

WHY DO YOU INSIST ON PRETENDING NOT TO KNOW THE PURPOSE OF THIS PLACE? LET ME DEMONSTRATE THE FUTILITY OF THIS

LET ME PROVE TO YOU I ALREADY KNOW WHAT YOU SEEK TO KEEP CONCEALED FROM ME.

"LOST IN THE VAST, IMMEASURABLE OUTER REACHES OF *SPACE*, DEEP IN THE ENDLESS SEA OF *TIME*, A PLANET...

"A DYING PLANET, ITS RESOURCES SPENT, ITS EVERY ACRE CRAMMED WITH CIVILIZATION, ITS MOONS AND NEAREST NEIGHBORS COLONIZED.

"A PLANET HARBORING A RACE WHOSE VERY EXISTENCE IS DEDICATED TO *CONQUEST*, TO THE SEIZING AND HOLDING OF *LAND*.

"IN WAVE AFTER INTERMINABLE WAVE THE COLONY SHIPS LEAVE THE CAPTURED WORLDS, FOR EACH NEW PLANET IS QUICKLY STRIPPED BARE, FODDER FOR THE MACHINERY OF CONSTANT EXPANSION.

"A THOUSAND WORLDS ARE SEIZED AND COLONIZED, EACH OF THOSE TAKES A THOUSAND MORE, EACH OF THOSE A THOUSAND MORE. A HUNDRED SUCH GENERATIONS AND A WHOLE *GALAXY* CAN BE SUCKED DRY.

"AND WHAT IS THE METHOD OF COLONIZATION?

"THE SHIPS ARE PROGRAMMED TO SEEK WORLDS IN THE EARLY STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT. SAVAGE, PRIMITIVE WORLDS.

"THEY LAND IN A REGION JUDGED MOST INHOSPITABLE TO THE NATIVE FAUNA.

"LANDING, THE SHIP ACTUALLY *GROWS*, DRAWING ELEMENTS FROM THE SOIL, THE WATER...

"WITHIN A HUNDRED YEARS THE SHIP HAS CEASED TO BE A SHIP. IT IS A MASSIVE COLONIZATION COMPLEX, COMPLETELY INSINUATED INTO THE PLANET'S FIBER.

"THEN A STRANGE, HYPNOTIC SIGNAL RADIATES OUT, CALLING EVERY LIFE FORM ON THE PLANET, SUMMONING ONE OF EACH.

"THE ONE THAT SURVIVES THE LONG TREK THROUGH THE HARD LANDS IS DEEMED REPRESENTATIVE OF THE DOMINANT LIFE-FORM.

"THAT HAPLESS CREATURE IS BUTCHERED, ITS VERY MOLECULAR STRUCTURE CRACKED AND ANALYZED.

"THE INFORMATION IS FED INTO THE COLONY SPORES, *MILLIONS* OF EGG-PAIRS, BLANK SLATES UPON WHICH IS NOW WRITTEN THE GENETIC CODE OF THE DOMINANT LIFE.

"THUS CONDITIONED, THE INDESTRUCTIBLE EGG-PAIRS ARE EJECTED, FIRED ON BALLISTIC PATHS THAT WILL CARRY THEM TO EVERY CORNER OF THE DOOMED PLANET.

"NOT ALL WILL SURVIVE THEIR HATCHING. NOT ALL WILL FIND THEIR MATE AND BE ABLE TO BREED. BUT THERE ARE *MILLIONS...!*

"AND ON AS MANY DIFFERENT WORLDS THEY HAVE SUCCESSFULLY ADAPTED TO COUNTLESS LIFE FORMS, ASSUMING THUS THE DOMINATION OF THE PLANETS.

"THAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED HERE, BUT FOR AN INEXPLICABLE FLAW IN THE COLONY SHIP.

"AFTER TEN THOUSAND YEARS IN SPACE ONE OF ITS DRIVE UNITS *EXPLODED.*

"IT DID NOT *LAND* ON THIS EARTH OF OURS. IT *CRASHED.*

"AND, DAMAGED IN THAT CRASH, IT FIRED OFF ITS PRECIOUS CARGO BEFORE THEY WERE FULLY READY.

" BEFORE GENETIC PROGRAMMING HAD OCCURRED.

"THUS THE CREATURE OCCUPYING THE EGG FORCED OPEN BY *GLADYS SMALLWOOD* WAS STILL PRIMED FOR CONDITIONING. *

*SEE ISSUE #2 --Denny.

"AND IN THE INSTANT THAT SMALL, UNDEFINED CREATURE MADE CONTACT WITH HUMAN CELLS IT ADAPTED ITSELF, MIMICING THE FORM AND FUNCTIONS OF A HUMAN FEMALE.

"BUT A RANDOM ELEMENT HAD BEEN INTRODUCED. FOR *FORTY THOUSAND YEARS* THE EGG HAD DRIFTED ACROSS THE OCEAN'S VAST AND SHIFTING FLOOR...

"TO SURVIVE ALL THOSE CENTURIES, THE EGG BECAME WATER PERMEABLE, AND THE MONSTER IN IT BECAME *AMPHIBIOUS.*

"THAT MONSTER, MARRINA, WAS *YOU!*

OF ALL THE MILLIONS OF EGGS LAUNCHED, FOUR HUNDRED CENTURIES AGO, IT SEEMS THAT ONLY *YOURS* SURVIVED, DAMAGED THOUGH IT WAS.

BUT YOUR PROGRAMMING WAS NOT DAMAGED, MARRINA. YOU ARE STILL A BROOD FEMALE, AND YOUR PURPOSE IS STILL TO COLONIZE THIS WORLD!

NO! NO! I KNOW NOTHING OF WHAT YOU SAY. PLEASE I AM NO ALIEN MONSTER. I AM HUMAN! *HUMAN!*

NO, YOU ARE NOT, LITTLE MARRINA. IF THAT WERE TRUE, I COULD NOT HAVE SUMMONED YOU HERE--NOR WOULD YOU HAVE ATTACKED AND NEARLY KILLED A HUMAN UPON RECEIVING THAT CALL. *

*ALSO *ISSUE #2*--Denny.

AND NOW IN ORDER THAT I MAY ASSUME MY *RIGHTFUL* POSITION AS *MASTER OF THE WORLD* THE TIME HAS COME FOR YOU TO *DIE... WHAT?!*

HOLD, "MASTER." *NAMOR* OF ATLANTIS FORBIDS THIS ACTION!

YOU'VE GOT A LOT MORE EXPLAINING TO DO THAN THAT *SCI-FI* OPUS. A *LOT* MORE.

SUB-MARINER AND THE INVISIBLE GIRL! I HAD NOT EXPECTED SO SOON TO COME INTO CONTENTION WITH THE LIKES OF YOU. BUT YOU WILL FIND THE MASTER IS NOT UNPREPARED!

MECHANICAL GRABBERS!

THEY SEEMED TO GROW RIGHT OUT OF THE WALLS!

OF COURSE! REMEMBER WHAT HE SAID, SUSAN! THIS SHIP IS LIKE SOME HIGH-ORDER ORGANISM, ABLE TO GROW AT HIS COMMAND.

YOU'RE BEGINNING TO SOUND LIKE REED, NAMOR. DON'T WASTE ENERGY ON EXPLANATIONS.

MY FORCE-FIELD SEEMS TO BE CONFUSING THESE TENTACLES...

BUT WE MUST STOP THE MASTER HIMSELF!

AS IF ON CUE...

THE TIME HAS COME TO RETREAT AND REGROUP.

SO FAR EVERYTHING IS GOING EXACTLY ACCORDING TO PLAN!

BU I MUST GIVE THESE HEROES THE ILLUSION THEY CONTROL THEIR OWN DESTINY OR ALL IS LOST.

FAREWELL, LITTLE MARRINA. KNOW THAT WHAT NOW OCCURS...

"...IS FOR THE GOOD OF ALL MANKIND!"

NO! NO! HELP ME!

I'M BEING TORN APART!

AT THAT MOMENT...

FROM A NEARBY CIRCULATION DUCT...

THE MOSQUITOES SWARM, BUZZING ACROSS THE GREAT CHAMBER.

THEN, MIRACULOUSLY...

FEAR NOT, MARRINA.

SASQUATCH IS NOT THE ONLY ONE WITH STRENGTH...

SNOWBIRD!

SNOWBIRD! THEN ALPHA-FLIGHT IS INVOLVED IN THIS!

SUSAN RICHARDS! AND PRINCE NAMOR! YOU TAKE ME QUITE BY SURPRISE!

INDEED, MY FELLOW ALPHAS ARE INVOLVED. ARE THE REST OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR WITH YOU?

"QUESTIONS LATER," SUE RESPONDS. "HELP US SMASH THESE GRABBERS. WE HAVE TO GO AFTER THE MASTER."

AND, NEARLY TEN MILES AWAY...

ALL SYSTEMS ARE RESPONDING AS EXPECTED. EVEN NOW GUARDIAN AND NORTHSTAR ARE BEING SUBTLY GUIDED.

WITHIN MINUTES THEY SHOULD REACH THE PRIME POWER COMPLEX...

NOW!

IT BEGINS!

Thom!

AT THAT MOMENT...

SAPRISTI! GUARDIAN, I THINK PERHAPS WE BROKE *TOO MUCH* OF THIS PLACE!

NOT AT ALL, NORTH-STAR.

WE HAD TO DO MAXIMUM DAMAGE TO ENSURE WE WERE KNOCKING OUT VITAL SYSTEMS.

I'M STILL IN CYBERNETIC LINK WITH THE COMPLEX, AND WHOLE AREAS ARE BLANKING OUT, GOING DARK.

SASQUATCH! I THOUGHT WE'D FIND YOU ALONG HERE.

I WON'T ASK HOW YOU DEDUCED THAT IN THIS FUN HOUSE, JIMMY. ARE YOU TWO RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PRESENT DISTURBANCE?

THAT WE ARE, 'SQUATCH I...

AURORE! LET HER GO, LANGKOWSKI!

NO! NO! LEAVE ME ALONE!

SACRE BLEU! SHE HAS BECOME JEANNE-MARIE!

VERY ASTUTE...

ALL RIGHT, CAN THE BANTER, PEOPLE. WE... SNOWBIRD! AND...

GREAT SCOTT! WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

YOU PROBABLY KNOW ALMOST AS MUCH AS WE DO AT THIS POINT, *VINDICATOR.* *

*SUE IS NOT AWARE OF *GUARDIAN'S* NAME-CHANGE-- DENNY.

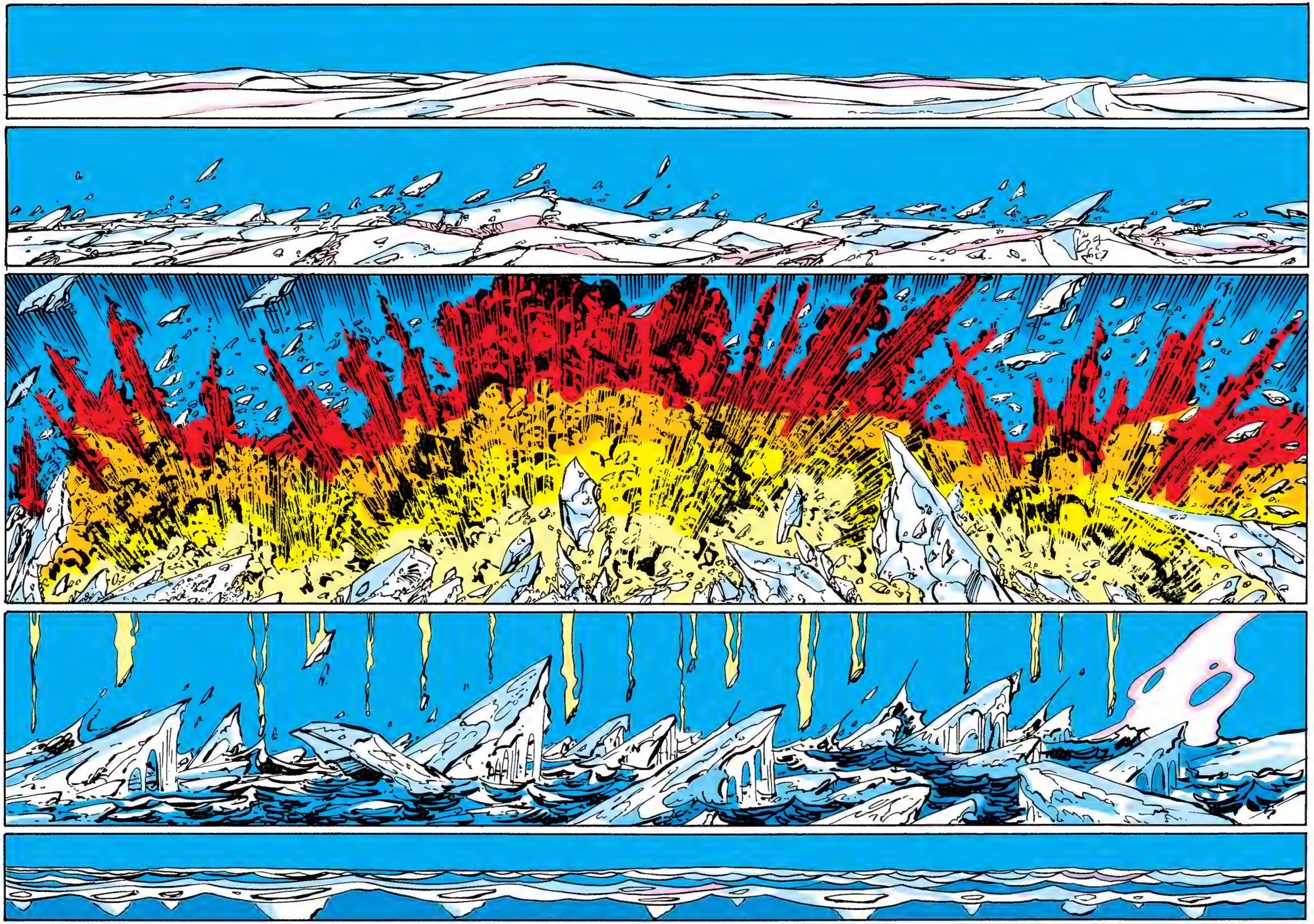
A QUICK SYNOPSIS LATER...

SO WE HAVE TO FIND THE MASTER...

HMM. HE MUST BE THE OTHER LIFE-FORM I'VE BEEN SCANNING. HE'S QUITE A WAYS OFF...

AND I THINK WE JUST RAN OUT OF TIME TO LOOK FOR HIM...

IT SOUNDS LIKE ALL THE DAMAGE WE'VE BEEN DOING HAS CAUGHT UP WITH US.



SUNNUVAGUN! WE MADE IT!

SUSAN, QUICKLY, OPEN YOUR FORCE-FIELD BUBBLE...

DONE, NAMOR, BUT...

THE MASTER, SUSAN! THERE IS A CHANCE HE SURVIVED, AS WE DID. I MUST SEARCH FOR A TRACE OF HIM...

SUB-MARINER, WAIT! LET ME COME WITH YOU!

TWENTY TENSE MINUTES LATER...

NOTHING! NO SIGN OF HIM AT ALL!

AND NO SIGN OF THE COMPLEX. NOT EVEN WRECKAGE.

IT IS AF IF IT *DISSOLVED* INTO THE OCEAN WATERS!

THEN OUR TASK HERE IS *DONE!*

I MUST RETURN TO MY CIVILIAN GUISE. FAREWELL, *ALPHA FLIGHT!*

TAKE CARE, SNOWBIRD. KEEP IN TOUCH.

SHE'S A COLD ONE, ISN'T SHE? SO COOL AND DISMISSING.

I... THINK WE SHOULD BE GOING NOW, TOO, DON'T YOU, PRINCE NAMOR?

"GOING"...? YOUR HIGHNESS, WHAT...?

THERE ARE MANY QUESTIONS YET SURROUNDING MARRINA, GUARDIAN. MY PEOPLE ARE BEST SUITED, I THINK, TO SOLVE THEM.

I HAVE INVITED MARRINA TO COME AND DWELL FOR A TIME IN ATLANTIS, AND SHE HAS AGREED.

WELL, IF THAT'S ALL AGREED ON, BEFORE WE GO OUR SEPARATE WAYS I NEED A LIFT BACK TO *NEW YORK*. THAT ISN'T OUT OF YOUR WAY, IS IT NAMOR?

NOT AT ALL, SUE. LET THE REST OF ALPHA FLIGHT DEPART, THEN YOU CAN DISPENSE WITH THIS FORCE FIELD RAFT, AND WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY.

GOOD LUCK, MARRINA. WE'LL MISS YOU.

SO-- ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER SUPER-VILLAIN SENT TO HIS JUST REWARD. I THINK WE CAN SAFELY MARK THIS ONE AS *CLOSED*.

I WOULDN'T BE SO QUICK TO WRITE OFF THE MASTER, WALT.

AND DON'T CLOSE THIS CASE JUST YET. I'VE GOT ONE UNENVIABLE TASK TO TAKE CARE OF BEFORE WE HEAD HOME.

*THE TWINS ARC TOWARDS LA BELLE **PROVINCE**. GUARDIAN'S COURSE CONTINUES EASTWARD...*

*UNTIL, ON THE RUGGED, ROCKY COAST OF CANADA'S YOUNGEST PROVINCE, **NEWFOUNDLAND**...*

DAN SMALL-WOOD!

HMM?

OH, *DOCTOR HUDSON*. GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, SIR. IS... IS MARRINA WITH YOU?

*THE YOUNGER MAN'S ENTHUSIASM BUBBLES IN HIS CLEAR GREEN EYES. HE HAS FUNCTIONED FOR MANY YEARS AS A KIND OF **BROTHER** TO THE ADOPTED MARRINA.*

BUT JAMES HUDSON RECOGNIZED THE FIRST TIME HE MET DAN SMALL-WOOD THAT HIS LOVE FOR MARRINA WAS SOMETHING MORE THAN FRATERNAL.

GUARDIAN WOULD GIVE MUCH TO AVOID THE WORDS HE MUST NOW SPEAK, BUT THEY ARE NOT TO BE ESCAPED.

HE TELLS HIM. QUICKLY, QUIETLY, WITH AS LITTLE PAIN AS POSSIBLE.

BUT THE ANGUISH THAT FLOODS DAN SMALLWOOD'S FACE SPEAKS VOLUMES.

*TODAY **ALPHA FLIGHT** MAY WELL HAVE SAVED THE WHOLE WORLD.*

BUT JUST NOW THE WORLD OF ONE YOUNG MAN IS ENDING...

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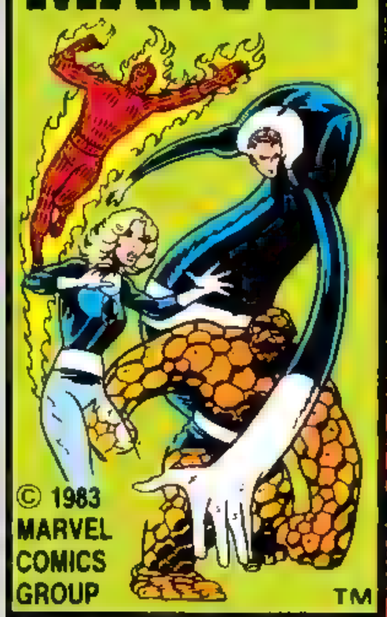

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Fantastic Four®

THE SEARCH FOR REED RICHARDS!

THE SEARCH FOR REED RICHARDS

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BOB BUDIANSKY EDITING

JIM SHOOTER SEARCHING

WELL, THAT WAS *INTERESTING*. YOU CERTAINLY HAVEN'T LOST YOUR... TOUCH, *NAMOR.*

A REMINDER, SUSAN. A REMINDER OF SOMETHING WHICH NEVER TRULY WAS, BUT MIGHT HAVE BEEN, IN ANOTHER WORLD, ANOTHER TIME.

THIS IS FANTASTIC! I'M *HERE*--IN NEW YORK--AT THE BAXTER BUILDING--WITH THE *SUB-MARINER* AND THE *INVISIBLE GIRL!*

**CHRONOLOGICAL NOTE:* THIS SCENE TAKES PLACE A FEW HOURS AFTER THE END OF *ALPHA FLIGHT* #4--BOB.

NOW, COME ALONG, *MARRINA.* IT IS TIME WE RETURNED TO OUR NATURAL HABITAT--*THE SEA!*

OF COURSE, YOUR MAJESTY.

IT WAS... WONDERFUL MEETING YOU, MRS. RICHARDS.

CALL ME SUE, MARRINA. TAKE CARE NOW.

DEFYING ALL KNOWN PHYSICAL LAWS, THE TINY WINGS ON HIS ANKLES BEAT, AND THE MIGHTY SUB-MARINER TAKES TO THE AIR!

WE WILL FLY AS FAR AS THE OCEAN ITSELF. I HAVE NO WISH TO PLUNGE US INTO EITHER OF THIS CITY'S POLLUTED RIVERWAYS.

AS YOU WISH, PRINCE NAMOR. I JUST CAN'T WAIT TO SEE *ATLANTIS!*

*AND AS THE TWO DWINDLE TO A TINY SPECK AGAINST THE CITY-BRIGHT HAZE, **SUSAN RICHARDS** TURNS HER THOUGHTS ELSEWHERE...*

NO ONE COULD ACCUSE ME OF LOAFING FOR THE PAST DAY OR SO.

IN LESS THAN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS I'VE BOUGHT A HOUSE, FOUGHT TWO BATTLES, AND SEEN THREE SUPER-VILLAINS DESTROYED!*

IT'S INCREDIBLE TO THINK THE MENACE OF *DOCTOR DOOM* IS FOREVER ENDED.

HELLO! HELLO! HANGAR DECK TO ALL LEVELS. *REED*, ARE YOU HOME YET?

JOHNNY?

BEN?

441

**FF #'S 259-260 & ALPHA FLIGHT #4--BOB.*

ONLY ECHOES ANSWER.

A FEW HOURS AGO SUSAN CAME BACK FROM CONNECTICUT TO FIND HER HUSBAND HAD NOT RETURNED FROM **AVENGERS' MANSION.**

THE UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL OF THE SUB-MARINER HAD DIVERTED HER FROM A REAL SEARCH...

...NOW SHE FEELS ANXIETY WELLING WITHIN HER ONCE MORE.

WHERE CAN HE *BE*? NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT HE FAILED TO RESPOND TO MY FLARE SIGNAL, TOO.*

NOTHING COULD PREVENT REED FROM RESPONDING IF HE SAW THAT FLARE...

ONLY ONE THING TO DO. I'LL HAVE TO CALL...

*LAST ISSUE. NOW YOU'RE ALL CAUGHT UP --**BOB.**

...AVENGERS' MANSION. **JARVIS** THE BUTLER SPEAKING. OH, GOOD EVENING, MRS. RICHARDS. NO, NO I'M AFRAID NONE OF THE AVENGERS ARE AVAILABLE AT THE MOMENT.

WELL, AS I UNDERSTAND IT THEY'VE GONE OFF TO THE S.H.I.E.L.D. SPACE STATION, TO GET HELP TRACKING A MYSTERIOUS **BEAM** THAT BREACHED THE MANSION EARLIER.

NO, I'M AFRAID I DON'T KNOW IF YOUR HUSBAND IS WITH THEM.

ALL RIGHT, THANK YOU, JARVIS. IF MY HUSBAND SHOULD TURN UP THERE, PLEASE ASK HIM TO CALL ME RIGHT AWAY. BYE.

NOW THAT DOESN'T SOUND AT ALL LIKE REED. CHARGING OFF WITH THE AVENGERS WITHOUT LEAVING WORD FOR ME?

IS THERE SOMETHING I CAN HELP YOU WITH, SUSAN?

OH--NORRIN RADD. YOU STARTLED ME. I'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN YOU WERE HERE. HOW ARE YOU?

QUITE RECOVERED, THANK YOU. EVEN INJURIES SUCH AS THOSE SUSTAINED IN MY BATTLE WITH TYROS CANNOT LONG INCAPACITATE A WIELDER OF THE POWER COSMIC.

BUT I SENSE THAT YOU ARE GREATLY TROUBLED...?

QUICKLY SUSAN EXPLAINS TO HER GLEAMING GUEST...

A BEAM? IT WAS A MATTER TRANSFERRAL BEAM, STRIKING FROM SPACE, WHICH DREW ME TO THIS CITY EARLIER TODAY.

I CARE LITTLE FOR THE SOUND OF THIS, SUSAN. IF YOUR HUSBAND WAS IN ANY WAY AFFECTED, IT BEHOOVES ME TO OFFER MY AID TO HIM--AND YOU.

BUT FIRST...

AND AS THE SILVER SURFER SPEAKS...

...IN WHAT WAS ONCE THE PARKING LOT OF WHAT WAS ONCE A SUPERMARKET IN QUEENS...

THAT'S THE SPOT, GEORGE.

RIGHT HERE DOC DOOM GOT ZAPPED INTA FAIRY-DUST BY TH' SILVER SURFER.

YOU SURE HE'S DEAD HARRY? LOOKS TO ME LIKE THERE'S SOMETHIN'...

...HAPPENIN'!!!

SCANT SECONDS LATER...

THAT BOARD OF YOURS NEVER CEASES TO ASTOUND ME.

IT PASSED RIGHT THROUGH THAT WALL WITHOUT EVEN LEAVING A HOLE.

SUCH IS THE WILL OF ***GALACTUS***, SUSAN. IT WAS HE WHO CREATED MY SHINING BOARD, AND IMPARTED TO IT A FRACTION OF HIS OWN ***COSMIC*** POWER.

NOW, COME QUICKLY. WE MUST DISCOVER THE WHEREABOUTS OF REED RICHARDS.

JUST SECURING MY HAIR, SURFER.

IF WE'RE GOING FLYING I DON'T WANT IT BLOWING IN MY EYES.

SILENTLY, THE BIZARRE TRANSPORT FLASHES ACROSS THE TOWERS OF MANHATTAN, PASSING ALONGSIDE THE DARK, GREEN SPRAWL OF CENTRAL PARK UNTIL...

THERE'S AVENGERS MANSION. CIRCLE IT QUICKLY, SURFER. LET'S SEE IF WE CAN SPOT ANY DAMAGE.

AS YOU WISH...

THERE!

WOW!

JARVIS WASN'T KIDDING WHEN HE SAID THE MANSION HAD BEEN BREECHED.

AND IF I REMEMBER THE LAYOUT, THAT SHOULD BE...

POLICE NYPD

...THE MEDICAL FACILITIES... *WANDA!* JARVIS TOLD ME ALL THE AVENGERS WERE OUT.

SUSAN...!

THE OTHERS *ARE* OUT, BUT I REMAINED BEHIND TO WATCH OVER MY HUSBAND, THE *VISION.* I TOLD JARVIS I DID NOT WISH TO BE DISTURBED.

THAT MUST HAVE BEEN WHAT HE MEANT. HOW IS THE VISION?

NO CHANGE... BUT SURELY YOU'RE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO REED?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? ISN'T HE WITH THE REST OF THE AVENGERS?

N-NO. SUSAN, I WISH I WAS NOT THE ONE TO HAVE TO TELL YOU THIS, BUT REED WAS CHECKING OUT THE CONDITION OF THE VISION... IT TOOK LONGER THAN HE'D ANTICIPATED, SO I WENT TO MAKE SOME TEA...

THAT WAS WHEN THE INTRUDER ALERT SOUNDED. I RACED BACK HERE TO FIND THIS GREAT HOLE HAD BEEN SLICED THROUGH THE WALL...

...AND... REED...?

I... I TRIED TO REACH YOU. HE'S GONE, SUSAN.

VANISHED WITHOUT A TRACE!

WITHOUT A TRACE? I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT! NOT WITH ALL THE SPECIALIZED SCANNING EQUIPMENT HERE IN THE MANSION-- EQUIPMENT REED HIMSELF HELPED *TONY STARK* DESIGN.

THERE HAS TO BE SOME INDICATION-- SOME SIGN!

DO NOT DISTRESS YOURSELF, SUSAN. THERE IS LITTLE THAT CAN TRULY BE HIDDEN FROM ONE WHO HAS RIDDEN THE COSMIC WINDS.

LOOK AWAY NOW MY FRIENDS! WHAT FOLLOWS NOW IS NOT FOR MORTAL EYES TO BEHOLD...

N-NORRIN RADD...?

THE INDESCRIBABLE POWER COSMIC PEELS AWAY THE FABRIC OF THE UNIVERSE ITSELF, ROLLING BACK THE HOURS FOR A LOOK INTO THE PAST...

...UNTIL...

YES...

IT IS AS I FEARED, SUSAN. THE BEAM I SAW FROM SPACE DID INDEED STRIKE THIS BUILDING, WHISKING AWAY YOUR HUSBAND TO A PLACE BEYOND THE DETECTION OF THE INSTRUMENTS WITHIN THESE WALLS.

I KNOW WHERE HE HAS GONE, AND IT IS BEYOND MY POWER TO TAKE YOU TO HIM, FOR BY THE WILL AND THE POWER OF *GALACTUS* IS THE SILVER SURFER EVER DENIED TO RIDE AGAIN THE BOUNDLESS COSMOS.

AND THAT IS WHERE THE QUEST FOR YOUR HUSBAND MUST SURELY TAKE YOU, FOR THE MAN CALLED *MISTER FANTASTIC* IS NO LONGER ON EARTH!

LEAVING THE SCARLET WITCH AND THE SILVER SURFER, THE INVISIBLE GIRL RACES BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING...

...WHERE LESS THAN HALF AN HOUR LATER, AFTER A FAMILIAR FLARE HAS BRIGHTENED THE MANHATTAN SKY...

YA MEAN TA SAY SOME SLIMEY ALIENS JUST SCOOPED UP REED AN' TOOK OFF WITH HIM?

THAT'S HOW IT LOOKS, *BEN*. AND WE MUST NOT WASTE A MINUTE GETTING AFTER HIM!

THAT'S A TALL ORDER, SUE. WITHOUT THE SILVER SURFER TO HELP US LOOK... WELL A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK WOULD BE EASIER.

I'M WELL AWARE OF THE IMMENSITY OF THE TASK, *JOHNNY*. IN FACT I'VE ALREADY TAKEN STEPS TOWARD CONTACTING SOMEONE ELSE WHO MIGHT HELP US.

BUT, ENOUGH TALK. IT'S TIME WE WERE ON OUR WAY.

"WE?" NOW HOLD ON JUST A SECOND, LITTLE LADY. DID I DREAM IT, OR DID YOU ANNOUNCE A COUPLA DAYS AGO THAT YER GONNA HAVE ANOTHER BABY?

BEN'S RIGHT, SIS. YOU JUST CAN'T POSSIBLY GO CHASING ALL OVER THE GALAXY. NOT IN YOUR CONDITION. YOU'D BETTER LEAVE THIS TO US.

I'M NOT INVITING A *DEBATE*, GENTLEMEN.

WITH REED MISSING, *I* AM THE ACTING LEADER OF THE *FANTASTIC FOUR*. WE WILL DO WHAT I SAY.

I DO NOT HAVE TO REMIND YOU THAT REED IS THE MAN I LOVE, AND THE FATHER OF THE CHILD I'M CARRYING.

NOTHING AND NO ONE IS GOING TO STOP ME FROM FINDING HIM!

MINUTES LATER, SPECIAL BAFFLES DAMPEN THE ROAR OF ROCKET ENGINES AS A UNIQUE SPACECRAFT LEAPS FROM ITS SILO ATOP THE BAXTER BUILDING.

ZERO PLUS TWENTY-EIGHT SECONDS. ALL SYSTEMS NOMINAL.

BEN, STAND BY TO ACTIVATE SECONDARY THRUSTERS.

WAY AHEAD OF YA, SUZIE. OUT OF ATMOSPHERE IN TWELVE SECONDS...

...AN' INTA THE *COSMIC RAY BELT* AGAIN...

UNBIDDEN, THE MIND OF **BEN GRIMM** TURNS BACK, TO ANOTHER ROCKET, ANOTHER LAUNCH...

PRIMARY CIRCUITS AT MAXIMUM FUNCTION. ALL SYSTEMS SHOW GREEN FOR FIRST STAGE JETTISON.

SHE'S BEHAVING LIKE A BABY. EVERY-THING IS PERFECT.

YEAH, EXCEPT FOR THE COSMIC RAYS. NO ONE KNOWS WHAT THEY'LL DO.

FOUR PEOPLE, FOUR FRIENDS, EMBARKING ON A BOLD VENTURE INTO THE UNKNOWN, REACHING FOR THE STARS, GUESSING NOT AT ALL WHAT FATE TRULY HELD IN STORE FOR THEM...

WE'RE ENTERING THE COSMIC STORM AREA! HANG ON!

FAK FAK FAK

HEAR THAT? IT'S THE COSMIC RAYS! THEY'RE *PENETRATING* THE SHIP!

AND AS THE UBIQUITOUS RAYS PIERCE THE HULL PLATES...

MY HEAD... POUNDING AS THOUGH IT'S ABOUT TO BURST!

BEN WAS RIGHT. WE SHOULD HAVE WAITED.

SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN HEAVIER SHIELDING...

JOHNNY...WHAT'S HAPPENING TO YOU?

I DON'T KNOW, SUE!

MY BODY FEELS HOT--LIKE I'M ON FIRE!

SOMEONE ELSE TAKE THE CONTROLS. MY ARMS ARE TOO HEAVY...

TOO HEAVY. GOTTA LIE DOWN...

CAN'T MOVE...

BEN!

ONLY THE SHIP'S SOPHISTICATED AUTOPILOT PREVENTS ULTIMATE TRAGEDY.

THE GLORIOUS MISSION TO THE STARS ENDS IGNOMINIOUSLY IN A WOODED AREA NORTH OF ITHACA, NEW YORK.

BUT THE TALE DOES NOT END THERE.

EXPOSED TO A POTENTIALLY LETHAL DOSE OF RADIATION, THE FOUR ADVENTURERS FIND THEMSELVES NOT DYING, BUT TRANSFORMED!

THEY HAVE BECOME...

MISTER FANTASTIC!

THE THING!

THE INVISIBLE GIRL!

THE HUMAN TORCH!

YEAH...YEAH, THAT'S HOW IT STARTED FOR ALL OF US, AN' LIFE'S BEEN ONE LONG PAIN IN TH' BUTT EVER SINCE.

SEEMS LIKE SUCH A LONG TIME AGO. SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED, IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE IT'S ONLY BEEN...

BEN!

DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME, BEN? I SAID IT'S TIME TO DEPLOY THE WINGS. WE'RE APPROACHING THE *BLUE AREA!*

SORRY, SUZIE, I WUZ... THINKIN'. WINGS OUT.

*THE BLASTED, CRATERED SURFACE OF EARTH'S **MOON** ROLLS BENEATH THEM...*

*...BRINGING CLOSER THE VAST **BLUE AREA**, A HUGE POCKET OF EARTH-LIKE ATMOSPHERE SHELTERED WITHIN A GREAT SYSTEM OF CRATERS...*

*...AND THE PRESENT LOCATION OF THE GREAT REFUGE, HIDDEN HOME OF THE AMAZING **INHUMANS.***

*BUT THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE NOT BOUND FOR **ATTILAN** TODAY.*

TWO HUNDRED MILES ACROSS THE BLUE AREA LIES THEIR TRUE DESTINATION...

THERE IT IS! THE HOME OF... *THE WATCHER!*

TH' WATCHER, HUH? YEAH, IF ANYONE CAN HELP US FIND YOUR HUBBINS, IT'S *HIM*. HE MAKES REED LOOK LIKE A KINDERGARTEN DROP-OUT.

BUT HOW DO WE GET INTO HIS HOUSE? I DON'T SEE ANY SIGN OF A DOOR...?

FOR SHAME, JOHNNY! HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN ALREADY? THE WAY TO ENTER...

...IS SIMPLY TO STEP THROUGH THE WALL!

MAN-O-MAN, I'D FORGOTTEN HOW *SPOOKY* THIS PLACE IS. THE WHOLE HOUSE MAKES ME FEEL LIKE I LEFT MY *3-D GLASSES* AT HOME...

REED SAYS THAT'S BECAUSE SO MUCH OF THE HOUSE ACTUALLY EXISTS *OUTSIDE* OUR CONVENTIONAL THREE DIMENSIONS.

YEAH, WELL IT'LL TAKE FOR-EVER TO FIND THE WATCHER ON FOOT. *FLAME ON!*

BUT...

HMM. SUDDENLY I DON'T THINK THIS WAS SUCH A GRAND IDEA AFTER ALL.

IT'S ONLY A COUPLE OF SECONDS SINCE I *LEFT* BEN AND SUE--BUT I'M NOT SURE I CAN FIND MY WAY *BACK* TO THEM...

BLAST! I WISH THE TORCH HADN'T FLOWN OFF LIKE THAT! I CONTACTED THE WATCHER BY SUB-ETHER WAVEBAND EARLIER, AND HE SAID HE'D BE HERE TO MEET US!

AND AS MY WORD IS GIVEN, SO IS IT KEPT, SUSAN RICHARDS.

EEP!

SILENCE SEEMS TO FLOOD THE VAST CHAMBER, A PALPABLE SILENCE, GIFTED ALMOST WITH A LIFE-FORCE OF ITS OWN.

AND, INTO THE GREAT CALM CENTER OF THAT SILENCE THE BEING KNOWN AS THE **WATCHER** STRIDES FORWARD. OLDER THAN OUR PLANET, OLDER PERHAPS THAN OUR GALAXY ITSELF, HE RADIATES THE WISDOM OF INFINITY IN HIS UNFATHOMABLE GAZE.

GREETINGS, EARTHLINGS! WELCOME TO MY HOME!

YOU GOT A FUNNY WAY OF SAYIN' HOWDY, BALDY.

YOU ALMOST SCARED THE TRUNKS OFF ME.

BEN, BE QUIET PLEASE. WATCHER, YOU KNOW OUR DILEMMA. HAVE YOU DECIDED YET WHETHER TO HELP US, OR NOT?

IT IS NOT THE NATURE OF MY RACE TO ASSIST THOSE WE OBSERVE, SUSAN. YET I HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT WITH THE HOMEWORLD.

THEY ARE AWARE OF WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED, AND BELIEVE INVOLVEMENT WOULD NOT BREAK OUR **OATH.**

THE MATTERS THAT CONCERN THE FATE OF YOUR HUSBAND MAY WELL AFFECT THE ***UNIVERSE***, AND ALL THAT DWELL IN IT.

COME, THERE IS A GREAT DISTANCE TO BE TRAVELED.

WAIT...

JOHNNY...? WHERE IS THE TORCH?

FEAR NOT, SUSAN RICHARDS. THOUGH HE VENTURED FAR INTO MY HOUSE, YOUR BROTHER IS UNHARMED.

I RETURN HIM NOW TO YOU...

HOLY--!

WHERE WAS I? IT FELT LIKE... LIKE...

I DON'T KNOW *WHAT* IT FELT LIKE!

YOU HAVE NO WORDS, JOHN STORM, TO DESCRIBE THE INDESCRIBABLE. TO SAVE YOU FROM THE DANGERS OF MY HOUSE...

...I SIMPLY REMOVED YOU FROM IT...REMOVED YOU FOR A MOMENT FROM THIS VERY PLANE OF REALITY.

THAT'S FANCY TALK, WATCHER. BUT WHEN ARE WE GETTIN' GOIN'?

AS FOR THAT, BEN GRIMM...

...WE ARE ALREADY ON OUR WAY...

AROUND THEM THE UNIVERSE SEEMS TO FOLD IN UPON ITSELF.

TIME AND SPACE SEEM SUDDENLY MEANINGLESS, MERELY THE FRAGILE CONCEPTS OF SMALL MINDS STRIVING HOPELESSLY TO COMPREHEND THEIR PLACE IN INFINITY.

AND THEN...

WE ARE NEARLY THERE, MY FRIENDS. LOOK NOW...

AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE, THEY STRETCH, FILLING THE SKY, OVER-WHELMING THE MIND WITH THEIR SHEER NUMBERS.

SOME ARE OLD, OLDER EVEN THAN MAN ON EARTH, SCARRED AND PITTED BY MILLIONS OF SPACE-FARING YEARS.

OTHERS ARE NEWER, GLEAMING SILVER SPINDLES, ALL SMOOTH LINES AND GRACEFUL CURVES, NOT YET MARRED BY THE ENDLESS STREAM OF MICRO-METEORITES THAT SCRIBE THEIR WAY THROUGH SPACE.

STILL OTHERS ARE ALMOST COMICAL CONTRAPTIONS, BITS AND PIECES OF A HUNDRED OTHER CRAFT, FRAGMENTS OF VESSELS, BOLTED AND STRAPPED TOGETHER.

WATCHER, WHO... WHAT ARE THEY? SO MANY SHIPS!

THEY ARE THE *SURVIVORS*, SUSAN. SAD REMNANTS OF ONCE PROUD WORLDS... WORLDS DEVOURED BY GALACTUS!

15.

GALACTUS! IS... IS THAT THE ANSWER, WATCHER? IS THAT WHY REED WAS TAKEN?

YOU SHALL LEARN SOON ENOUGH, SUSAN. FOR NOW, PREPARE YOURSELVES...

OUR JOURNEY IS AT AN END.

THIS SHIP... IT'S SO HUGE, SO OLD! I CAN ALMOST *FEEL* ITS AGE, LIKE A GREAT WEIGHT.

IT'S LIKE THAT SHIP WE ENCOUNTERED IN THE *NEGATIVE ZONE*-- THE ONE THAT HAD BEEN ON A TEN THOUSAND-YEAR QUEST...*

YEAH, WELL THIS AIN'T THE TIME FER NOSTALGIA, HOTSHOT! WE GOT COMPANY!

*SEE FF#252--BOB.

16.

I AM XXAN XXAR, LEADER OF THE DELEGATE COUNCIL. I BID GREETINGS TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR*.

YOU... KNOW WHO WE ARE?

WATCH IT, SUZIE. DON'T GET TOO CLOSE TO 'EM UNTIL WE KNOW WHAT'S UP.

*TRANSLATED BY THE FF'S UNIVERSAL TRANSLATORS.

OF COURSE WE KNOW YOU. THE FANTASTIC FOUR OF PLANET EARTH ARE LEGEND THROUGHOUT THE GALAXY.

IN THAT CASE PERHAPS YOU'D BE SO KIND AS TO TELL ME WHAT YOU'VE DONE WITH MY HUSBAND?

CERTAINLY. IF YOU WILL ALL FOLLOW ME, I WILL TAKE YOU TO HIM.

STILL VERY MUCH ON THEIR GUARD, THE FF, ALONG WITH THE WATCHER, ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE LED THROUGH THE STRANGE, ANCIENT VESSEL.

LOOKIT THIS PLACE! LOOKS LIKE A CASTIN' CALL FOR E.T. II.

HOW MUCH FURTHER, XXAN XXAR?

NOT MUCH NOW, SUSAN RICHARDS.

THERE IS THE ONE YOU SEEK...

HOLY!

R-REED!

S-SUE? WHAT... ARE YOU ... DOING HERE? YOU MUST... GET AWAY...

REED! OH MY DEAR LORD! WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO HIM?

DOING, SUSAN RICHARDS? WE ARE *EXECUTING* HIM!

"FOR WAS IT NOT REED RICHARDS WHO COMMITTED THE ULTIMATE CRIME AGAINST ALL LIFEKIND?

"WHEN THE WORLD-DEVOURING *GALACTUS* LAY *DYING*...

"...WAS IT NOT REED RICHARDS WHO *SAVED HIM?* *

* IN FF#244-- BOB.

"SAVED HIM--SO THAT NOT TWENTY FULL CYCLES HAD ELAPSED BEFORE THE *MONSTER* STRUCK AGAIN?

"SAVED HIM--THAT HE MIGHT DESTROY THE *SKRULL* THRONEWORLD, AND WITH IT, SEVEN BILLION SKRULLS?"

WHAT? YA MEAN YER GONNA KILL REED, JUST BECAUSE GALACTUS ACED THEM STINKIN' SKRULLS? YA OUGHTA GIVE HIM A MEDAL!

GUARDS!!

YEOW!

BEN! WHY THOSE MISERABLE...!

JOHNNY, NO! WE CAN'T FIGHT OUR WAY OUT OF THIS ONE! REED DID THE RIGHT THING, SAVING GALACTUS! SOMEHOW WE'VE GOT TO MAKE THESE PEOPLE REALIZE THAT!

LOOK... I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU MUST ALL HATE AND FEAR GALACTUS, BUT DON'T YOU SEE REED HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO SAVE HIM? WE MAY HAVE FOUGHT GALACTUS, BUT IN THE END WE HAD NO RIGHT, AS NO ONE HAS THE RIGHT, TO SIMPLY STAND BY AND LET HIM DIE.

WHAT BLINDLY ALTRUISTIC CREATURES YOU EARTHLINGS ARE!

SAVE YER BREATH, SUZIE. IT TOOK ME LONG ENOUGH TA REALIZE TH' BIG BRAIN DONE GOOD.

I AIN'T GONNA WASTE TIME WAITIN' FER THESE YAHOOS TA FIGGER IT OUT!

BEN--CAREFUL -- WHAT ARE YOU...

I'M SETTIN' YA FREE, EINSTEIN! WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? SHEESH, YOU CAN BE SO *THICK* SOMETIMES!

GUARDS! GUARDS!!

STOP THE EARTHLING! WEAPONS SET TO *KILL!*

ENOUGH!!

AFTER THE FASHION OF MY PEOPLE, I HAVE ALLOWED THIS PETTY SQUABBLING TO PROCEED WITHOUT MY DIRECT INTERVENTION.

BUT NOW I MUST *ACT*, FOR THERE ARE MATTERS HERE OF GRAVE CONCERN...

CONCERN TO EVERY LIVING THING IN THE *UNIVERSE!*

WITHIN MINUTES, IN A GREAT COUNCIL HALL ABOARD ONE OF THE NEWER SHIPS...

THIS BOARD IS IN AGREEMENT THAT WE PERHAPS ACTED TOO HASTILY IN OUR DECISION TO EXECUTE THE EARTHLING.

HOWEVER, WE STILL FEEL THAT REED RICHARDS MUST BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SKRULL HOMEWORLD.

FOR, IF HE HAD NOT CONVINCED HIS FELLOW HUMANS TO ACT TO SAVE *GALACTUS*, THE RAVAGER OF WORLDS WOULD HAVE PERISHED MANY CYCLES PAST, AND SEVEN BILLION SKRULLS WOULD STILL BE ALIVE. WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THIS, REED RICHARDS?

THERE... IS LITTLE I TRULY CAN SAY, IF IT IS A *DEFENSE* OF MY ACTIONS THAT YOU SEEK. THE SKRULLS ARE--OR WERE--THE MOST RELENTLESSLY *EVIL* RACE IN THEIR GALAXY, YET HUMAN COMPASSION DEMANDS THAT I MOURN THEIR PASSING, AND NOTHING WILL EVER RELIEVE ME OF MY PART, DIRECT OR OTHERWISE, IN THEIR ANNIHILATION.

YET, THAT SAME COMPASSION IS WHAT DROVE ME TO SAVE *GALACTUS*. YES, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASIER TO ALLOW HIM TO DIE, AND THERE WERE THOSE WHO ARGUED FOR THAT.

BUT WHO ARE WE TO MAKE SUCH A DECISION? TO ALLOW ANOTHER LIVING BEING --ANY LIVING BEING-- TO DIE, WHEN OURS IS THE POWER TO PREVENT IT?

UNDERSTAND ALSO, GENTLEMEN, THAT THERE IS ABOUT *GALACTUS* MUCH, MUCH MORE THAN MERE MORTAL MINDS CAN EVER COMPREHEND. MY RACE HAS KNOWN OF HIM SINCE HIS VERY BEGINNINGS, YET WE UNDERSTAND ONLY A TINY FRACTION OF HIS OVERWHELMING POWER AND PURPOSE.

AND DO NOT DOUBT THAT *GALACTUS HAS A PURPOSE*. THERE IS AN *ORDER* OF THINGS IN THIS UNIVERSE. ONE SUCH AS HE WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO EXIST UNLESS HE HAD A PLACE IN IT.

THERE IS MUCH TO CONTEMPLATE. *GALACTUS* DESTROYED OUR WORLDS, KILLED HUNDREDS OF BILLIONS OF OUR PEOPLE.

YET, DO WE NOT ALSO DESTROY LIFE WHEN *WE* FEED? EVEN THOSE OF US WHO EAT ONLY *PLANTS*...

WE MUST, I THINK, RECONSIDER OUR POSITION...

NO!!

WE ARE *LILANDRA*, MAJESTRIX SHI'AR. WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED OF YOUR CRIME.

WE HAVE ALREADY GIVEN WARNING TO THE EARTHLINGS ONCE THAT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS WOULD NOT GO UNPUNISHED.

FOR HIS UNSPEAKABLE CRIME AGAINST ALL THINGS THAT LIVE...

REED RICHARDS MUST DIE!

JOIN US IN 30 DAYS -- FOR THE TRIAL OF REED RICHARDS -- AND SOME TRULY SURPRISING GUEST STARS!

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

Fantastic Four

MARVEL®

HEY GUYS, I KNOW IT'S ASSISTANT EDITOR MONTH, BUT LET'S NOT DO ANYTHING TOO SILLY ON THE COVER- OKAY? LOVE & KISSES

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JAN
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APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

THE TRIAL OF REED RICHARDS

NEW YORK, N.Y. 9:17 AM.

LOOK, JOHN, I KNOW YOU'RE REAL BUSY, BUT THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR IS ALMOST TERMINALLY LATE. NOW, NEITHER OF US WANT TO PRODUCE AN FF ISSUE THAT'S STAN LEE PRESENTS TWENTY-TWO BLANK PAGES AND SOME ADS.

WELL, WE'VE GOTTA DO SOMETHING, JOHN. I'VE GOT JIM NOVAK STANDING BY, READY TO LETTER IT, GLYNIS WEIN ALL READY TO COLOR IT. WHAT DO I TELL THEM?

BUT I DON'T REALLY SEE ANY ALTERNATIVE, JOHN, DO YOU? JIM SHOOTER LEFT ME IN CHARGE OF THE FF'S BOOK. I DON'T WANT MY OFFICIAL CREDIT TO BE MIKE HIGGINS, REPRINT EDITOR.

SCHEDULE DREAM ON!!

1 AUG.

IN

OUT

FINE -- TWENTY-FOUR HOURS. BUT DON'T FAIL ME, JOHN. YOU'VE NEVER MISSED A DEADLINE YET -- BUT THIS IS REAL CLOSE!

MIKE, I APPRECIATE YOUR POSITION, BELIEVE ME. BUT I JUST DON'T HAVE THE STORY FOR THIS ISSUE. I'VE BEEN CALLING AND CALLING ALL WEEK, BUT ALL I GET FROM THE BAXTER BUILDING IS THE FF'S ROBOT RECEPTIONIST MAKING POLITE APOLOGIES.

TELL 'EM I'M SORRY, BUT I'M NOT ABOUT TO RISK MAKING UP A STORY. YOU KNOW HOW THE FF HATE IT WHEN WE DO THAT... ESPECIALLY THE THING!

EVANSTON, IL. 8:17 AM.

ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT! GIVE ME ANOTHER TWENTY-FOUR HOURS, OKAY? I'LL TRY THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S HEADQUARTERS AGAIN, AND IF I DON'T GET SATISFACTION I'LL INVENT A STORY.

DISGRUNTLED, THE WRITER-ARTIST CUTS OFF ONE CONNECTION WITH NEW YORK, ONLY TO ESTABLISH ANOTHER...

OKAY, ONE MORE TIME... 1-800-555-4444...

NOW, *BE THERE* THIS TIME, WILLYA GUYS?

BUT...

FANTASTIC FOUR INCORPORATED, MAY I HELP YOU, PLEASE?

OH, GOOD MORNING, MR. *BYRNE*. NO, I'M SORRY, BUT THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE STILL OUT.

NO, I STILL DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY ARE, BUT I *WILL* TELL THEM YOU CALLED.

WELL... *FEH!!* AT THIS RATE, I WILL HAVE TO MAKE UP SOME DUMB...

EH?

JOHN BYRNE!!

JOHN BYRNE, I HAVE COME FOR YOU!

THE WATCHER!

JUST THEN...

OKAY, HONEY, I'M OFF TO THAT *WESTINGHOUSE SHOOT.* I'LL BE BACK AROUND SIX...

JOHN?

JOHN... ?!

BUT *ANDREA BRAUN BYRNE'S* HUSBAND NO LONGER EXISTS IN MORTAL TERMS...

FOR, IN A PLACE OUT OF SPACE AND TIME...

?...WATCHER... ?

FEAR NOT, *EARTH-MAN.* NO HARM CAN BEFALL YOU HERE. WE ARE BEYOND THE PHYSICAL PLANE.

YOU ARE NOW BEING SHOWN SIGHTS THAT FEW *HUMAN* EYES HAVE EVER BEHELD.

I... I APPRECIATE THAT, SIR, BUT... *WHY ME?*

BECAUSE YOU ARE THE *CHRONICLER,* JOHN BYRNE. BECAUSE TO YOU HAS FALLEN THE TASK OF RECORDING THE EXPLOITS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.

AND EVEN AS WE SPEAK EVENTS UNFOLD WHICH MAY HERALD THE LAST ADVENTURE OF THAT HEROIC FOURSOME. SO MUST YOU REPORT UPON...

THE TRIAL OF REED RICHARDS

I CAN'T *BELIEVE* ALL THIS! I WISH THE WATCHER HAD LET ME TAKE TIME TO GRAB A CAMERA--OR AT LEAST MY SKETCHBOOK!

MRS. *RICHARDS* -- WHAT IS THIS? WHAT'S HAPPENING?

HUH? WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU DOING HERE, BYRNE?

HUMPH! MAYBE HE'S COME TA TRY AN' GET TH' STORY *RIGHT* THIS TIME!

4.

YEAH? WELL, I THINK WE'RE TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN A *COMIC BOOK STORY!*

APPARENTLY THE WATCHER DISAGREES WITH YOU, KID. *SUE...?*

OH, JOHN, IT'S JUST *TERRIBLE!* YOU REMEMBER WHEN *REED* HELPED SAVE THE LIFE OF *GALACTUS*, ALL THOSE MONTHS AGO? WELL, NOW ALL THE SURVIVORS OF WORLDS *GALACTUS* HAS CONSUMED WANT TO *KILL* REED!

YEAH, AN' WE ALMOST HAD 'EM CONVINCED BIG BRAIN DONE TH' RIGHT THING SAVIN' THE *BIG G...*

5.

"THEN THAT BLASTED *BIRD LADY* TURNED UP AN' QUEERED THE WHOLE DEAL!"

"'BIRD LADY'?" BYRNE WONDERS ALOUD.

"OMIGOSH! THAT'S *PRINCESS LILANDRA!!*"

LILANDRA IS THE NAME, ALRIGHT, JOHN. BUT THESE DAYS SHE'S CALLING HERSELF "*MAJESTRIX SHI'AR*"-- WHATEVER *THAT* MEANS.

WE FIRST ENCOUNTERED HER SOME MONTHS AGO... OUR TIME.

"ON THE NIGHT BEFORE WE ENTERED THE *NEGATIVE ZONE...**"

GALACTUS IS THE ENEMY OF ALL THAT LIVES-- FOR HE DESTROYS THOSE MOST RARE AND PRECIOUS OF RESOURCES, PLANETS CAPABLE OF SUPPORTING LIFE--AND BY SAVING HIM YOU HAVE BRANDED YOURSELVES HIS ALLIES.

SHOULD HE CONSUME ANY WORLD KNOWN TO US YOU WILL BE IN PART RESPONSIBLE... AND WILL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR IT... TO THE FULL EXTENT OF SHI'AR LAW!**

*SEE FF ISSUES 251-256. **SEE X-MEN #167--MIKE.

WHY THAT ARROGANT WITCH! I ALWAYS HAD THE IMPRESSION SHE WAS TOO FULL OF HER OWN IMPORTANCE, BUT TO ACTUALLY *THREATEN* THE FANTASTIC FOUR...!

BUT THE OUTRAGED TIRADE IS CUT SHORT, AS...

WE ARE LILANDRA, MAJESTRIX SHI'AR, AND APPOINTED *PROSECUTOR.*

LET THE TRIAL BEGIN! OUR FIRST WITNESS: *KARANT KIAR...*

...SKRULL PRELATE OF THE SEVENTH QUADRANT.

WHAT TH'--! WHERE DOES SHE GET OFF STARTIN' TH' TRIAL? WE AIN'T EVEN PICKED TH' *JURY* YET!

BY HIS OWN CHOICE *REED RICHARDS* IS TO BE TRIED BY M'NDAVIAN PROCEDURES, *BEN GRIMM*--THE MOST PERFECT LEGAL SYSTEM IN THE GALAXY.

G.

SEE THE GREAT **GLOW GLOBES** THAT DEPEND FROM THE VAULT OF THE COURT? NOTE HOW THEIR COLORS FLICKER AND CHANGE CONSTANTLY?

THEY MONITOR THE EMOTIONS, THE JUDGEMENTS OF **ALL** PRESENT. THUS ALL--ACCUSED, WITNESSES, PROSECUTION, DEFENSE--ALL ARE JUDGE AND JURY. AND SHOULD ALL THE GLOBES TURN **WHITE** AT ANY TIME, THEN IS THE VERDICT **NOT GUILTY**, AND THE TRIAL IS AT AN END.

HUH!

"NOW ATTEND, BEN GRIMM. THE WITNESS SPEAKS..."

I AM KARANT KIAR. I AM PRELATE OF THE SEVENTH QUADRANT OF THE SKRULL EMPIRE.

HEAR MY WORDS, O YOU GATHERED RACES, SURVIVORS OF THE **HUNGER** OF **GALACTUS.**

HEAR MY WORDS, AND SHARE MY ANGUISH AND MY RAGE AT THE **DEATH** OF A **WORLD!**

"SIXTEEN SPANS PAST, THE **HERALD** OF **GALACTUS** APPROACHED OUR HOMEWORLD.

"EVERY AVAILABLE SHIP WAS SENT TO STOP HER, BUT THE ONE-TIME **EARTHLING** SMASHED THEM ALL!

"THUS DID **GALACTUS** COME AT LAST.

"FOR TIME OUT OF MEMORY WE SKRULLS HAVE FEARED **GALACTUS**, AND HIDDEN OUR ENERGIES FROM HIM.

NOW THERE WAS NO HIDING...

"AS **GALACTUS** SANK BENEATH THE PLANET'S CRUST, SO DID THAT CRUST BURST.

"LIKE THE SKIN OF SOME OVERRIPE FRUIT IT SPLIT, AND SPILLED ITS BLAZING JUICES ACROSS THE SURFACE.

"AND, SINKING THROUGH THE MOLTEN ROCK TO THE VERY *CORE*, *GALACTUS* THERE BECAME A RAVENOUS *MAW*...

...A LIVING *BLACK HOLE*, SUCKING INTO ITSELF EVERY IOTA OF PLANETARY MASS.

"ONLY TO SPEW THEM OUT A MOMENT LATER, CRACKED, DRAINED, EMPTIED OF THAT MYSTIC ESSENCE WHICH IS THE *LIFE-FORCE* OF A WORLD!

"ALL THIS WE SAW ON LONG RANGE SCANNERS, AS WE RACED FROM THIRTY THOUSAND LIGHT YEARS DISTANT...

...TO ARRIVE TOO LATE...

...TOO LATE.

THE THRONEWORLD WAS NO MORE, SHATTERED... LIFELESS FRAGMENTS ALONE LEFT TO MARK THE POSITION OF A ONCE PROUD PLANET.

AND IT NEED NOT HAVE BEEN SO! OUR EMPRESS R'KLLL, OUR BELOVED PRINCESS ANELLE, *SEVEN BILLION SKRULLS* WOULD STILL BE ALIVE! BUT FOR THE ACTIONS OF ONE *HUMAN!*

BUT FOR REED RICHARDS!

AND, IN THE DOCK...

HE'S *RIGHT*. IF I HAD NOT ACTED TO SAVE *GALACTUS* ALL THOSE SKRULLS WOULD STILL BE ALIVE.

IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO COMPREHEND-- SEVEN BILLION PEOPLE, *ANNI-HILATED* IN A MATTER OF HOURS. EVIL THOUGH THE SKRULLS MAY BE, IT STILL SEEMS A *CRIME* TOO HORRIBLE FOR EVEN THE MOST CONTEMPTIBLE OF ALL THE UNIVERSE'S RACES TO SUFFER.

YET, I DID NOT ACT WITHOUT THINKING. I BELIEVED WHAT I DID WAS *RIGHT!*

AND I *STILL* BELIEVE IT!

MEANWHILE...

THE SKRULL HAS SPOKEN, AND HIS IS BUT ONE SMALL VOICE, CRYING OUT ITS TORMENT IN A VAST, AGONIZING *SYMPHONY* OF ANGUISH.

THE PROSECUTION WILL NOW SHOW THAT REED RICHARDS *KNEW* WHAT HE DID--KNEW THE INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS ACTIONS!

ONE BY ONE SHE CALLS UPON THEM, GRIM SURVIVORS ALL OF THAT SAME FATE WHICH BEFELL THE THRONE-WORLD OF THE SKRULLS.

LIKE THE MINUTE HANDS OF SOME GREAT COSMIC **CLOCK** THEY STEP FORWARD, RECOUNTING THE YEARS, THE CENTURIES, THE MILLENNIA OF THE LIFE OF **GALACTUS.**

FOR SOME THE STORY OF HIS COMING IS AS A FRESH WOUND, RUNNING RED WITH THE BLOOD OF BILLIONS. THEIRS IS THE VOICE OF RAGE, OF ANGER.

FOR OTHERS THE TALE IS OLD, NEAR LEGENDARY, HANDED DOWN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION IN HUSHED AND FRIGHTENED WHISPERS.

AT THE LAST ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NO MEMORIES OF LIFE ON A GREEN AND GLOWING PLANET, THOSE FOR WHOM SHIPBOARD LIFE HAS BECOME ALL, FOR WHOM **GALACTUS** HAS BECOME A MONSTER WITH WHICH TO FRIGHTEN NAUGHTY CHILDREN.

BUT IN EVERY INSTANCE THE STORY IS THE SAME...

CAN'T SAY I CARE MUCH FOR THE WAY THIS IS GOING. I SAID AT THE TIME IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASIER TO LET *GALACTUS* DIE.

GUARD YOUR WORDS, ***JOHNNY STORM***, LEST THEY COUNT TOWARDS YOUR BROTHER-IN-LAW'S ***UNDOING.***

I HAVE NOW A ***TASK*** THAT ONLY YOU CAN PERFORM.

A TASK? NOW YOU'RE TALKING, WATCHER. I'M ABOUT GOIN' ***BUGGY*** WITH ALL THIS STANDING AROUND.

FLAME ON!

YOUR ENTHUSIASM DOES YOU JUSTICE.

NOW, BE-GONE TO REALMS BEYOND MORTAL KEN.

THE ***DEFENSE*** HAS NEED OF A VERY SPECIAL WITNESS. YOU MUST GUIDE HIM HITHER.

THEN, AS THE HUMAN TORCH WINKS FROM SIGHT...

WATCHER... WAIT... THE TORCH... WHAT... I MEAN, WHERE HAVE YOU...?

CALM YOURSELF, JOHN BYRNE...

HAVE I NOT PROMISED THAT ALL THINGS SHALL BE MADE KNOWN TO YOU IN TIME?

TAKE NOW YOUR PLACE WITH THE REST OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR. IT IS TIME TO BEGIN THE DEFENSE!

HUH? YOU MEAN THE WATCHER IS GOING TO BE *MISTER FANTASTIC'S* DEFENSE COUNCIL? DOESN'T THAT *VIOLATE* HIS RACE'S CODE OF NON-INTERFERENCE?

THE WATCHER SAYS NOT, JOHN. HE SAYS THAT *MORE* THAN JUST REED IS ON TRIAL HERE. HE SAYS IT IS *GALACTUS* HIMSELF WHO IS BEING JUDGED.

AND THAT MAKES THIS TRIAL SO IMPORTANT THAT ITS EVENTUAL OUTCOME WILL EFFECT EVEN THE WATCHER'S OWN RACE!

AS THE BEAUTIFUL *INVISIBLE GIRL* CONCLUDES...

HEAR *ME* NOW, SURVIVORS. I AM *UATU*, OF THE RACE OF THE *WATCHERS*. MINE IS A PEOPLE OLDER THAN ALL YOUR HISTORIES COMBINED. OURS WAS A PLANET OF THE FIRST TO FORM FROM THE COSMIC FIRES THAT BIRTHED THE *UNIVERSE*.

LONG HAS THE BEING CALLED *GALACTUS* BEEN *KNOWN* TO US, AND LONG HAVE WE SOUGHT TO *COMPREHEND* HIM.

REED RICHARDS' ACT WAS BASED UPON HIS OWN SMALL COMPREHENSION OF THE *COSMIC ALL* OF *GALACTUS*. REED RICHARDS SHALL THUS BE THE FIRST TO SPEAK NOW...

HOW DO YOU *PLEAD* TO THE CHARGE HERE BROUGHT AGAINST YOU?

HOW ELSE CAN I PLEAD BUT...

...*GUILTY!*

"GUILTY!"

A SINGLE WORD, SPOKEN SOFTLY, YET WITH GREAT RESOLVE. IT LANCES THROUGH THE ALIEN ASSEMBLY LIKE AN ELECTRIC CHARGE.

AND TO THE SMALL BAND OF WATCHING **HUMANS** THE EFFECT IS NO LESS **GALVANIC**...

NO! NO! DON'T SAY IT, REED! DON'T GIVE UP!

T-TAKE IT EASY, SUZIE... YER HUBBINS NEVER QUITS THAT EASY.

HE'S GOT SOME ACE UP HIS SLEEVE... HE'S ***GOTTA HAVE!***

GUILTY? THEN YOU ACCEPT YOUR PART IN THIS MOST HEINOUS OF ALL CRIMES, REED RICHARDS?

YOU STAND PREPARED AND READY TO FACE THE FULL AND IRREVOCABLE ***WEIGHT*** OF SHI'AR LAW?

NOT AT ALL, MAJESTRIX.

I REMIND THE COURT THAT THE CHARGE AGAINST ME IS THAT OF WILLINGLY SAVING THE LIFE OF ***GALACTUS.***

THAT ACTION IS A DOCUMENTED, HISTORICAL ***FACT.*** IT WOULD BE POINTLESS FOR ME TO ATTEMPT TO DISCLAIM IT, AND THEREFORE I MUST PLEAD ***GUILTY AS CHARGED.***

BUT I FURTHER REMIND YOU THAT THE ISSUE BEFORE THIS BODY TODAY IS ***NOT*** WHETHER OR NOT I SAVED ***GALACTUS***, BUT RATHER IF SO DOING IN FACT CONSTITUTES A ***CRIME.***

OF THAT I CAN SAY ONLY THIS...

WHEN ***GALACTUS*** FIRST CAME TO EARTH ALL THOSE LONG YEARS AGO WE WERE TOLD BY THE WATCHER THAT HE WAS NOT ***EVIL*** -- THAT ***GALACTUS*** IS IN FACT ***BEYOND*** GOOD AND EVIL.

THAT IS A STATEMENT WHICH HAS LONG TROUBLED ME, FOR IF A BEING IS TRULY NEITHER GOOD NOR EVIL HE IS BY DEFINITION ***NEUTRAL.***

YET CLEARLY ***GALACTUS*** IS NOT A ***NEUTRAL*** BEING. WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY HE FEEDS UPON THE LIFE-ESSENCE OF WHOLE PLANETS, AND SHOULD THOSE PLANETS PROVE TO BE INHABITED HIS EFFECT IS ***CATASTROPHIC*** TO SAY THE LEAST.

HOW CAN ANY ***RATIONAL*** MAN JUDGE THAT TO BE ***NEUTRAL?***

ALBERT EINSTEIN ONCE SAID THAT "GOD DOES NOT PLAY AT DICE." HE MEANT THAT THERE IS AN ORDER OF THINGS IN OUR UNIVERSE.

AND IT DOES NOT REQUIRE ANY BELIEF IN A SUPREME BEING TO REALIZE THAT *GALACTUS* MUST SOMEHOW BE PART OF THAT ORDER--AND, I SUSPECT, AN *IMPORTANT* PART.

FOR IF HE IS TRULY TO BE CONSIDERED *NEUTRAL* THEN THE APPARENT *EVIL* OF HIS ACTIONS, MUST, IN THE END RESULT, NOT BE EVIL.

AND SO, THEY MUST BE PART OF SOME GREATER *GOOD*.

I CANNOT BELIEVE HE WOULD BE *ALLOWED* TO EXIST, IF THIS WERE NOT THE CASE.

IS THAT YOUR DEFENSE, REED RICHARDS? A CHILD'S GAME OF *ARITHMETIC*?

WHERE THEN IS YOUR *PROOF*? PROOF THAT THE DEATHS OF UNCOUNTED BILLIONS WORK TOWARD A GREATER GOOD?

ULTIMATELY I HAVE NO PROOF, MAJESTRIX. I HAVE ONLY LOGIC...

... LOGIC AND FAITH.

MEASURE NOW THE POWER OF THE *INTELLECT* OF THIS LONE EARTHMAN, FOR HE HAS REASONED *ORDER* OUT OF *CHAOS*.

AND HE HAS REASONED *CORRECTLY*, AS WILL BE SHOWN WITH THE TESTIMONY OF MY SECOND WITNESS...

"LOOK NOW TO THE CENTER OF THE COURT..."

WATCHER, HE CAME! HE *CAME*!

AND WOULD HAVE DONE SO E'EN *WITHOUT* THY PLEA, LAD. THERE ARE MATTERS HERE THAT BE OF GREAT CONCERN TO *ODIN*!

ODIN?! HOLY FRIJOLES! THE WATCHER MUST HAVE SENT THE TORCH TO ASGARD!!!

HE... HE'S SO... IMPOSING! WE'VE ALL MET THOR HALF A DOZEN TIMES...

...BUT SOMEHOW I NEVER MADE THE CONNECTION-- ASGARD! THE ANCIENT NORSE GODS! AND ODIN -- THEIR RULER!

AN' HE SAID HE WUZ GONNA COME AN' TESTIFY FER REED EVEN IF TH' WATCHER HADN'T ASKED!

REMIND ME TA BE IMPRESSED--WHEN I GET OVER BEIN' FLABBERGASTED!

THIS WITNESS IS, I BELIEVE, KNOWN TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COURT.

HE IS CALLED AS AN EXPERT WITNESS ON THE SUBJECT OF GALACTUS. ARE HIS... CREDENTIALS ACCEPTABLE TO THE PROSECUTION?

Y-YES...

THEN HEAR THE WORDS OF ODIN, FOR THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF GALACTUS IS KNOWN TO US.

HEAR THESE WORDS, AS GALACTUS HIMSELF DID SAY THEM UNTO THOR, MY NOBLE SON, AND KNOW ALL THAT THEY BE TRUE!

"ONCE THERE WAS A WORLD. A WORLD OF SUCH MAGNIFICENCE THAT EVEN FABLED ASGARD MIGHT SUFFER IN THE COMPARISON --THE PLANET TAA!

"BUT FOR ALL ITS GLORIES IT WAS A PLANET DOOMED, A PLANET DYING.

"AND IN ALL THAT WORLD ONE MAN ALONE HAD THE WISDOM TO KNOW WHAT IT WAS THAT SO DOOMED THEM, AND THE WORDS TO SPEAK ITS NAME...

THE PLAGUE THAT THREATENS US ALL HAS NO CURE, FOR IT IS THE FINAL PLAGUE OF ENTROPY!

OUR WORLD, OUR VERY UNIVERSE IS GRINDING TO ITS END!

"HIS NAME WAS GALEN, AND THO' HE KNEW IT NOT, HE WOULD BECOME GALACTUS!

"THUS DID GALEN AND A SMALL CREW OF BRAVE MEN LEAVE THE WORLD OF TAA, SEEKING OUT THE CENTER OF THEIR UNIVERSE...

"...THAT PLACE WHERE *TIME* AND *SPACE* ENDED AS ALL THINGS RETURNED FROM WHENCE THEY HAD SO LONG SINCE COME.

" THE UNIVERSE BECAME A GIANT *BLACK HOLE*, CONSUMING ITSELF.

"AND INTO THAT UNIMAGINABLE CENTER PLUNGED THE *LAST OF TAA*, ALL THERE TO *PERISH*...

"...ALL SAVE *ONE*.

"AND TO HIM A VOICE WHISPERED, A VOICE BEYOND OUR COMPREHENSION: *THE SENTIENCE OF THE UNIVERSE!*

"NO BEING CAN GUESS HOW LONG THE MAN ONCE CALLED GALEN LAY IN THE EMBRACE OF A DYING COSMOS.

"BUT WHEN THAT DEATH GAVE ITSELF AS BIRTH TO *OUR* UNIVERSE, THE LAST SHIP OF TAA WAS FLUNG OUT--SOMEHOW REMADE!

"IT, AND ITS LONE SURVIVOR WAS EVENTUALLY FOUND BY ONE OF THE WATCHER'S RACE.

"IN KEEPING WITH HIS TRADITION, THAT WATCHER *STUDIED* THE ENERGY-THING THAT WAS ONCE GALEN OF TAA.

"STUDIED, BUT DID NOTHING TO INTERFERE WITH ITS GROWTH, ALLOWING IT TO LEAP AGAIN TO SPACE, RESHAPING THE LAST SHIP INTO A GREAT *INCUBATOR!*

"LONG DID THAT SILENT CUBE DRIFT, AS THE UNIVERSE GREW AROUND IT, AND LIFE SPREAD.

"THEN...

"...THEN CAME THAT FATEFUL DAY WHEN THE CUBE WAS *OPENED*...

"...AND GALACTUS LIVED!"

THUS WAS BORN INTO THE NEW UNIVERSE A NEW *NATURAL FORCE*. LIKE THE SOLAR WIND, LIKE THE SUPER-NOVA...

...LIKE THE ROILING SEAS THAT TESTED OUR VIKING WORSHIPPERS. TESTED THEM, AND MADE THEM *STRONG*.

SUCH IS THE *FUNCTION* OF *GALACTUS*. TO EACH WORLD IN TIME HE COMES AND HIS VERY COMING IS A *TEST*.

THOSE THAT PASS THE TEST ARE STRENGTHENED BY IT, AND MADE MORE WORTHY OF THAT GREAT FATE WHICH IS THE PROMISED *END* OF OUR UNIVERSE.

THOSE THAT FAIL, FAIL *TOTALLY*, AND ARE FOREVER EX-PUNGED, WIPED FROM THE SLATE OF TIME AND SPACE.

THE ACTIONS OF REED RICHARDS WERE IN *NO WAY* CRIMINAL. LET THIS TRIAL BE AT AN *END*! *SO SPEAKS ODIN!!*

AND, AS THE MYSTIC WINDS RISE, TO BEAR AWAY THE LORD OF ASGARD...

WA-*HOOO*! WE DID IT! WE *WON*!

I KNEW TH' BIG BRAIN WOULD GET CLEARED! I KNEW IT!

IT'S SO WONDERFUL! IT'S ALMOST TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE!

UMM... JUST A MINUTE GANG...

"...I DON'T THINK WE'RE DONE YET..."

THE PROSECUTION RESPECTS THE *KNOWLEDGE* OF THE ENTITY *ODIN*, BUT HE HAS NO *AUTHORITY* IN THIS COURT.

THE TRIAL DOES NOT END UNTIL A VERDICT OF *NOT GUILTY* IS DELIVERED, AND SOME REMAIN UNCONVINCED.

THEN LET'S CUT THROUGH THE FORMALITIES, SHALL WE?

*A RIPPLE OF **FEAR** FOLLOWS THE BLAZING FEMALE AS SHE SWOOPS LOW OVER THE ONLOOKERS.*

SHE IS THE HERALD OF GALACTUS.

SHE IS NOVA!

AND SHE IS ALSO...

FRANKIE! SUE-- IT'S FRANKIE!

TAKE IT EASY, BABY BROTHER! SHE'S NO LONGER TRULY *FRANKIE RAYE*. SHE BELONGS TO THE COSMOS...

AND WHERE SHE GOES...

GALACTUS IS SURE TO FOLLOW!

AND IF HIS HERALD BROUGHT FEAR, IMAGINE IF YOU CAN THE TERROR, THE BLIND, UNREASONING PANIC THAT NOW RIPS THROUGH THE ASSEMBLAGE.

A MILLION AND MORE ALIEN EYES LOOK UPON HIM WHO IS GALACTUS, AND FOR EACH RACE THE VISION DIFFERS.

FOR GALACTUS IS TRULY NO LONGER A BEING IN THE ABSOLUTE, PHYSICAL SENSE. HE IS AS ODIN NAMED HIM, A FORCE OF NATURE.

AND EACH MIND THAT VIEWS HIM STRUGGLES AS BEST IT CAN TO PERCEIVE THAT UNGUESSABLE FORCE AS AN IMAGE IT CAN COMPREHEND.

BUT, AS PANIC TRANSFORMS CALM AUDIENCE INTO THUNDERING MOB...

GALACTUS! AT LAST!

THERE IS ONE FOR WHOM THE PRESENCE OF THE PLANET-KILLER BRINGS NOT FEAR, BUT GRIM RESOLVE.

A HUNDRED SPANS I HAVE WAITED FOR THIS MOMENT-- WAITED FOR MY VENGEANCE!

STRANGE, ALIEN COMPONENTS SNAP AND CLICK TOGETHER, AND A **WEAPON** GROWS IN THE TREMBLING HANDS OF **XXAN XXAR.**

BUT **GALACTUS** DOES NOT NOTICE.

HE *IGNORES* ME! HE DOES NOT KNOW HIS ***DEATH*** IS IN THIS SMALL WEAPON. FOR IT FIRES A SINGLE TINY PELLET THAT WILL BEGIN A ***CHAIN REACTION!***

A CHAIN REACTION THAT WILL CONSUME HIS ARMOR, UNLEASHING THE ENERGIES WITHIN, SCATTERING HIS BEING ACROSS A MILLION CUBIC PARSECS.

I THINK...

THERE WAS NO WAY TO ***TEST*** IT ...AND HE SEEMS SO... SO...

IF IT SHOULD ***FAIL...***

IF IT SHOULD NOT ***DESTROY*** HIM... IF IT SHOULD INSTEAD ONLY ***ANNOY*** HIM...?

RESOLVE WEAKENS...

BEFORE THE IMPLACABLE **POWER** OF **GALACTUS**, XXAN XXAR FEELS SUDDENLY SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT.

HE HOPES HIS LOST RACE WILL FORGIVE HIM, AS HIS OATH OF VENGEANCE MUST WAIT FOR ANOTHER DAY...

AND, NO MORE AWARE OF THIS BRIEF DRAMA THAN IS A MAN OF THE BACTERIA THAT THRIVE ON HIS LIVING FLESH, GALACTUS SPEAKS...

HEAR THE WORDS OF *GALACTUS*. I BRING NO DOOM TO THOSE GATHERED HERE THIS DAY. I BRING INSTEAD *JUSTICE* FOR THAT MORTAL I NAME *FRIEND*.

REED RICHARDS IS A NOBLE SPIRIT, UNTAINTED BY THE PETTINESS OF FEAR AND HATE. HIS DEED WAS *HONORABLE* AND *GOOD*.

SO SPEAKS *GALACTUS*. SO SPEAKS THE COSMIC *TRUTH*!

MAJESTRIX--HAVE A CARE! I AM SWORN EVER TO PROTECT YOU, BUT AGAINST *GALACTUS* I HAVE NOT THE POWER!

YET, SUMMONING HER COURAGE, LILANDRA FACES HER GREATEST FEAR.

Y-YOUR WORDS HAVE NO VALUE IN THIS COURT, RAVAGER.

BY NAMING HIM YOUR FRIEND YOU SERVE NOT TO SAVE REED RICHARDS, BUT TO *CONDEMN* HIM!

YOU ARE KNOWN TO ME, LILANDRA.

BUT I HAVE CONSUMED NO SHI'AR WORLD. WHY TROUBLE YOURSELF IN MATTERS OF NO CONCERN TO YOU?

THE MATTERS HERE CONCERN THE FATE OF ALL *LIFE-KIND*, GALACTUS.

I AM SWORN PROTECTOR OF ALL THAT LIVES, AGAINST THE LIKES OF YOU.

AND I *REJECT* YOUR TESTIMONY, UNLESS TO NAME IT A FINAL NAIL IN THE COFFIN OF THE ACCUSED.

I FEAR YOU HAVE DONE MORE *ILL* THAN *GOOD* BY YOUR APPEARANCE HERE, *GALACTUS*.

YET, STILL THERE IS A CHANCE--A CHANCE THAT WE MIGHT PLUCK *SALVATION* OUT OF *HOPELESSNESS*.

I KNOW WHEREOF YOU SPEAK, WATCHER. OUR POWER COMBINED MIGHT PEEL AWAY THE VEIL AND BRING *HIM* TO US!

THEN SO LET IT BE DONE!

THEIR HANDS DRAW NEAR, AND ANCIENT ENERGIES STIR...

AND A SINGLE BOLT OF INCONCEIVABLE FORCE RIPS WIDE THE VERY FABRIC OF *REALITY.*

A TEAR, A WOUND OPENS IN THE EMPTY AIR, A GATEWAY THAT SEEMS TO TAKE ON *HUMAN FORM!*

WHO SUMMONS *ETERNITY?*

ETERNITY!

DOCTOR STRANGE TOLD ME OF HIM... A SINGLE BEING WHO IS THE SUM TOTAL OF ALL LIFE, ALL THINGS IN THE *UNIVERSE!* *INCREDIBLE!*

IT IS I WHO SUMMON YOU, *FATHER.* YOUR POWER AND KNOWLEDGE ARE NEEDED HERE THIS DAY.

SUCH THINGS ARE KNOWN TO ME, *GALACTUS!*

A MORTAL LIFE HANGS IN THE BALANCE, BECAUSE YOUR *TRUTH* IS DOUBTED.

SO THEN LET THE ANCIENT *BOOK* BE OPENED, LET THE MINDS OF MORTALS HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE *UNKNOWABLE.*

LET THE COSMIC TRUTH BE TOLD!

IT IS AS IF FOR A MOMENT SOME GREAT AND LONG-SEALED DOOR HAS SWUNG WIDE.

FEAR AND HATRED ARE FORGOTTEN AS IN EACH MORTAL MIND THERE BRIEFLY FLARES A PURE, GOLDEN LIGHT, SWEET AND THRILLING, TOUCHING SOUL AND INTELLECT ALIKE.

IN THAT MOMENT ARE THE MANY MADE ONE, AND THE ONE MADE MANY, AS EACH MIND IS SUDDENLY THE SAME MIND, EACH SOUL THE SAME AGELESS SOUL.

THEY WALK FOR A WHILE THE PATH OF GALACTUS, AND THEY FIND IT LONG AND HARD INDEED.

THEY ARE THE COUNTLESS BILLIONS OF THE UNIVERSE GONE, AND OF THE UNIVERSE YET TO BE. THEY SEE AND FEEL THE JOYS, THE SORROWS, THE GLORY AND THE PAIN.

AND THROUGH IT ALL THEY FEEL AN OVER-WHELMING SENSE OF PURPOSE, A SURE KNOWLEDGE THAT THERE IS A DESTINY FOR THE UNIVERSE--A GRAND AND GLORIOUS DESTINY.

AND WITH IT COMES A PAIN OF REALIZA-TION--THE IMAGE OF A UNIVERSE SHORN OF GALACTUS, AND, AS A CONSEQUENCE, THAT GREAT DESTINY SO SUDDENLY SNUFFED OUT, LIKE A LONE CANDLE IN A COLD NIGHT WIND.

TO ALL MORTALS PRESENT IS THIS COSMIC TRUTH MADE PLAIN.

THREE HOURS LATER...

...AND THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED, MIKE. ETERNITY MADE EVERYONE... ONE WITH THE UNIVERSE, AND WE ALL JUST KNEW *GALACTUS* HAD A PLACE IN IT.

LILANDRA--EVERYONE THERE--*ACCEPTED* THAT REED HAD DONE WHAT *HAD TO BE* DONE, AND EVERYONE JUST SORT OF... DRIFTED AWAY. THE FF AND I WERE SENT BACK TO EARTH.

GOSH, JOHN, UH... MAYBE YOU'VE BEEN INHALING TOO MUCH OF YOUR PENCIL SHAVINGS OR SOMETHING--THAT'S A WILD STORY!

WELL, JUST GET IT ALL ON PAPER, AND GET IT OFF TO ME *ASAP.*

THE FF'S FANS ARE GONNA *PLOTZ* WHEN THEY READ THIS ONE.

CRAFT WELL YOUR TALE, JOHN BYRNE, BUT DO SO *QUICKLY.* ALREADY THE FULL MAJESTY OF THE *COSMIC TRUTH* IS FADING, FOR NO MORTAL MIND CAN LONG CONTAIN SUCH KNOWLEDGE.

WHAT? YOU MEAN WE'RE ALL GOING TO FORGET? WILL LILANDRA GO AFTER REED AGAIN BECAUSE OF THIS?

NO. ONLY THE *ULTIMATE TRUTH* WILL FADE. THE CORRECTNESS OF REED RICHARDS ACTIONS SHALL REMAIN UNQUESTIONED.

BUT... WHAT ABOUT *GALACTUS,* WATCHER? IS HIS TASK ENDED NOW? OR WILL EVERYONE JUST HAVE TO CONTENT THEMSELVES WITH WATCHING HAPPILY THE NEXT TIME HE CONSUMES A WORLD?

TO RENDER THINGS THUS WOULD BE TO ROB LIFE-KIND OF *FREE WILL,* AND IN ALL THE COSMOS BUT ONE BEING IS DEPRIVED OF THAT FREEDOM: *GALACTUS.*

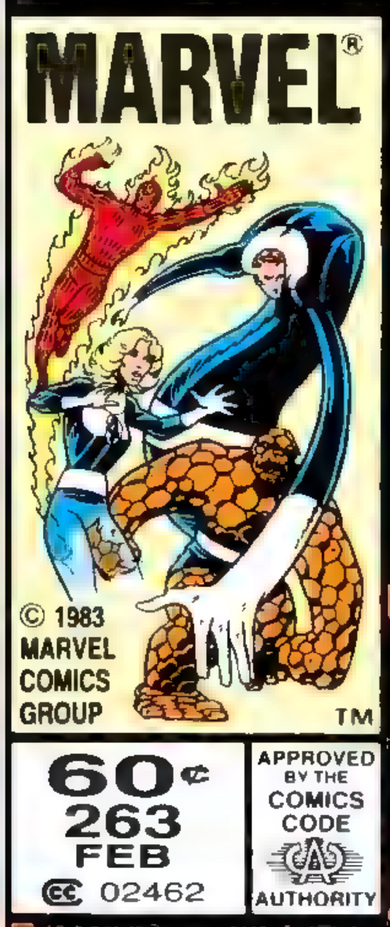
THEN, WHAT WILL HAPPEN, WATCHER?

GALACTUS WILL GO ON. THE *TESTING* WILL CONTINUE, UNTIL THAT DISTANT DAY HE FINDS A WORLD WITH POWER ENOUGH TO STOP HIM, TO END FOR ALL TIME HIS COSMIC HUNGER.

ON THAT DAY SHALL *GALACTUS* PERISH.

ON THAT DAY LET THE *UNIVERSE* MOURN.

NEXT ISSUE: **THE MESSIAH!**



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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

Fantastic Four®

JOHNNY--!

R AND R

WELL, HONEY, I'M OFF TO "WORK"...

SUSAN!

...THE RECENTLY PURCHASED HOME OF **REED AND SUSAN RICHARDS**, BETTER KNOWN AS REED AND SUSAN **BENJAMIN** TO ALL THEIR NEW NEIGHBORS IN BELLE PORTE, CONNECTICUT.

TODAY SUSAN IS PREPARING A NURSERY FOR THE CHILD THE COUPLE SOON EXPECT.

EDITOR'S NOTE: IT'S BEEN ONLY ONE ISSUE SINCE "**THE TRIAL OF REED RICHARDS**", BUT SEVERAL MONTHS HAVE ELAPSED FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE **FANTASTIC FOUR**--MONTHS OF PEACE AND TRANQUILITY, OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL RECUPERATION.

IT CAN'T POSSIBLY LAST...

STAN LEE PRESENTS:
JOHN BYRNE / WORDS AND PICTURES

JIM NOVAK
LETTERS

GLYNIS WEIN
COLORS

BOB BUDIANSKY / EDITING

JIM SHOOTER / EDITOR IN CHIEF

OH, DRAT!

GOT IT!

BRAVO DARLING! A PERFECT CATCH! SOMETIMES BEING THE *INVISIBLE GIRL* CAN HAVE ITS DOMESTIC ADVANTAGES.

WELL, BEING ABLE TO PROJECT AN INVISIBLE FORCE FIELD DOES HAVE USES OTHER THAN BATTLING BAD GUYS

NOT THAT WE'VE BEEN DOING A WHOLE LOT OF *THAT* LATELY. IT'S BEEN MONTHS SINCE WE'VE SEEN HIDE OR HAIR OF ANY WORLD-THREATENING MENACES. MAYBE OUR NEW "SECRET IDENTITIES" ARE JUST MAKING US HARDER TO FIND.

YES. I'LL HAVE TO CALL THE *AVENGERS* AND ASK IF THEIR WORK LOAD HAS INCREASED ANY. HA HA.

WILL YOU NEED ANYTHING FROM THE CITY?

NO. I WAS PLANNING ON PICKING UP SOME GROCERIES LATER MYSELF.

YOU GONNA PUT ON YOUR *DISGUISE* NOW, DADDY? I LOVE IT WHEN YOU PUT ON YOUR DISGUISE.

INDEED I AM, *FRANKLIN*. AND WITH MY ELASTIC BODY IT'S AS EASY AS ONE...

...TWO...

...THREE.

IMPRESSIVE AS EVER, DARLING. BUT I THINK I'D STILL HAVE PREFERRED-- OH--*ROBERT REDFORD*, OR *SEAN CONNERY*.

PERHAPS. BUT IF I'D WANTED TO DRIVE THE NEIGHBORHOOD LADIES WILD... WELL, I COULD JUST KEEP MY OWN FACE!

TRUE. IT'S ALWAYS BEEN MORE THAN GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME. NOW, YOU'LL TAKE PROPER CARE IN THE CITY?

OF COURSE. IN FACT, I SHOULDN'T BE MORE THAN FOUR OR FIVE HOURS. I JUST WANT TO CHECK SOME OF THE AUTOMATED SCANNERS.

WELL, JUST DON'T GO CHARGING OFF TO SAVE THE WORLD ON YOUR OWN WHILE I'M... OUT OF ACTION, AND *JOHNNY* AND *BEN* ARE IN CALIFORNIA.

THUS, A FEW MINUTES' PLEASANT WALK THROUGH SUBURBAN BELLE PORTE, AND...

THIS RECENT ADOPTION OF SECRET IDENTITIES HAS CERTAINLY PROVED AN INTERESTING VENTURE.

WE'VE BEEN OUT OF OUR *BAXTER BUILDING* HOME AND HEADQUARTERS FOR FOUR AND A HALF MONTHS NOW...

YET IT'S STILL A STRANGE FEELING, TAKING THE BUS TO "WORK" EACH DAY.

TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER...

I WONDER WHAT THE NEIGHBORS WOULD THINK, SEEING "REED BENJAMIN" LEAVING HOME...

CLIC

...IF THEY KNEW I WAS IN FACT COMING TO THIS RENTED GARAGE...

...DEACTIVATING THE SPECIAL CODE-LOCKS I INSTALLED...

BZZT

CLIC

...AND OPENING IT UP TO FIND NOT AN AUTOMOBILE...

...BUT OUR SHORT-RANGE *FANTASTICAR.*

VISUAL DEFLECTION SCREEN ACTIVATED. NO ONE WILL SEE ME PULL OUT.

AND IN LESS THAN TWENTY MINUTES I'LL BE AT OUR HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK.

THUS, EXACTLY SEVENTEEN MINUTES LATER THE REMARKABLE CRAFT SWOOPS IN ACROSS THE GLEAMING TOWERS OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST CITY.

AUTOMATED SENSORS HAVE SCANNED AND IDENTIFIED ME...

THE BAXTER BUILDING IS LOWERING ITS DEFENSE MODE FOR ENTRY.

AND, A FEW MINUTES AFTER THAT THE MAN CALLED MISTER FANTASTIC IS "AT WORK".

EVERYTHING SEEMS PEACEFUL. FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS IS TO CHECK THE EXPERIMENTS I LEFT ON SELF-EVALUATION!

AND SO...

PERFECT, PERFECT, AND PERFECT. GOOD OLD BAXTER BUILDING. SHE ALMOST RUNS *BETTER* WITHOUT US HERE!

HMM--SPEAKING OF THINGS RUNNING BETTER, I *DID* PROMISE TO GIVE AVENGERS MANSION A CALL TODAY, TO CHECK ON THE CONDITION OF THE *VISION.**

COMM-LINK, OPEN PRIORITY CHANNEL A, PLEASE.

*FELLED BY A *NULL-FIELD* IN *AVENGERS* #233 --BOB.

ALMOST INSTANTLY...

AVENGERS MANSION.

REED RICHARDS. GOOD OF YOU TO CALL.

VISION! I DIDN'T EXPECT TO SEE YOU BACK ON YOUR FEET. HOW ARE YOU... FEELING?

I AM NEARLY RECOVERED, THANK YOU--ALTHOUGH I AM NOT, AS YOU PUT IT, "BACK ON MY FEET."

IN POINT OF FACT, I AM STILL IN MY RESTORATIVE CYLINDER, BUT MY CIRCUITS ARE TIED INTO THE AVENGERS' COMPUTER-LINKS.

AND FROM THERE YOU ARE ABLE TO ARTIFICIALLY GENERATE AN IMAGE OF YOURSELF ON THE MONITOR? I'M IMPRESSED. I DID NOT THINK EVEN *YOUR* SOPHISTICATED SYSTEMS CAPABLE OF SUCH A THING.

MY RECUPERATIVE PROCESSES HAVE ENABLED ME TO TAP... UNSUSPECTED ABILITIES, REED.

BUT, IF YOU WILL EXCUSE ME, THERE ARE CERTAIN MATTERS OF PRIORITY I MUST NOW ATTEND.

VISION, WAIT, I...

CONFOUND IT, HE'S CUT TRANSMISSION. I COULD PROBABLY ACTIVATE AN OVERRIDE, BUT...

REED'S UNMATCHED INTELLECT PONDERS THE SITUATION...

HE SOUNDED MOST... *ODD*, EVEN FOR THE VISION. I HOPE NOTHING IS AMISS. PERHAPS I SHOULD...

HMM?

THE AUTOMATIC SCANNERS... WHAT ON EARTH!?

BUT WE MUST WAIT A WHILE TO LEARN WHAT REED RICHARDS HAS DISCOVERED.

FOR NOW WE TURN OUR EYES WESTWARD, AND OUR CLOCKS BACK THREE HOURS...

...AND LOOK IN ON THE INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED **WONDERWORLD** AMUSEMENT PARK IN CALIFORNIA...

...SPECIFICALLY, THE NEWLY COMPLETED **GRAND PRIX RACE COURSE**, AND TWO VERY SPECIAL MEMBERS OF OUR CAST.

AW, **BEN**, DON'T BE SUCH AN OLD STICK-IN-THE-MUD.

I JUST SAID I DON'T LIKE IT...

17 OMNIROYAL

BUT THAT'S WHAT YOU **ALWAYS** SAY. YOU'RE ALWAYS THE ONE TO SEE THE DARK CLOUD INSIDE EVERY SILVER LINING. BEING ASKED TO THE FIRST WONDERWORLD INVITATIONAL RACE IS AN **HONOR**. AND I'VE BEEN DYING FOR AN EXCUSE TO GET BACK INTO MY RACING THREADS.

SURE, SURE. BUT WHAT'S THIS IDEA OF KEEPIN' WHO ALL THE CONTESTANTS ARE A **SECRET**? WOULDN'T THEY GET A BIGGER CROWD IF THEY ANNOUNCED WHO WAS RACIN'?

OURS IS NOT TO REASON WHY, BEN. IT'S PROBABLY SOME P.R. GUY'S STROKE OF GENIUS. I MEAN, IT'LL BE INTERESTING WHEN WE ALL "UNMASK" AT THE END OF THE RACE.

YEAH, YEAH. I'LL GO SOAK UP SOME SUN. THAT'S WHY I TAGGED ALONG ANYWAY. HAVE FUN, HOTSHOT.

NOW, MAYBE YOU SHOULD LEAVE BEFORE YOU BLOW MY COVER.

I STILL DON'T LIKE IT.

AND, AS A DISGRUNTLED **BEN GRIMM** MOVES THROUGH THE CROWD...

THE THING!

17

A FEW MOMENTS LATER...

I SURE WISH BEN WOULD KICK THE "O-WOE-IS-ME" TRIP HE'S BEEN ON FOR THE PAST FEW MONTHS. SURE, BEING THE THING IS NO PICNIC, BUT...

JOHNNY! JOHNNY STORM!

HUH?

JULIE ANGEL...?!

IN THE... AH... FLESH! HEY, GREAT TO SEE YOU AGAIN, CUTIE. WELCOME TO SUNNY CALIFORN-EYE-AY.

ER, YEAH, THANKS, HOW'S EVERYTHING BEEN WITH YOU? SHARON* TOLD ME YOU'D MOVED OUT HERE WITH GREY LANDERS.

WELL, NOT EXACTLY. GREY GOT OFFERED THE LEAD IN "SON OF THE RETURN OF THE EMPIRE STRIKES OUT," OR SOMESUCH. HE THOUGHT THERE MIGHT BE A PART FOR ME, SO I TAGGED ALONG, STRICTLY FOR PROFESSIONAL REASONS.

AND THEY'RE FILMING *HERE?*

OH, NO. THE JOB FELL THROUGH, SO I GOT AN AGENT AND HUNG AROUND A WHILE. HE TRIED TO GET ME A MAGAZINE LAYOUT, BUT I COULDN'T GET INTO THAT "SUCK IN YOUR TUMMY AND POINT YOUR TOE" ROUTINE.

SO YOU THOUGHT YOU'D HANG AROUND A RACETRACK IN YOUR BIKINI?

NOT QUITE. I'M DOING A MOTOR-OIL SPOT. YOU KNOW, GIRLS IN SWIMSUITS, AND GREASY MECHANICS.

*SHARON SELLECK IS JULIE'S N.Y. ROOMIE -- BOB.

SO, ANYWAY, I SAW THE THING... I MEAN, MR. GRIMM, AND I FIGURED **YOU** MIGHT BE ONE OF THE MYSTERY RACERS, SO...

CONTESTANTS TO YOUR AUTOS PLEASE!

UHM... 'SCUSE ME, JULIE.

SURE THING.

OH, AND *GOOD LUCK.*

UMPH!

CATCH YOU AFTER THE RACE!

NOT AGAIN! I JUST GOT *OVER* HER!

MINUTES LATER, ALL THOUGHT OF JULIETTE D'ANGELO IS BANISHED, AS...

CONTESTANTS, START YOUR ENGINES.

ON YOUR MARK.

GET SET.

GO!

VROOM

ALMOST FROM THE STARTING GUN IT SEEMS THERE WILL BE LITTLE DOUBT ABOUT THE OUTCOME OF THIS RACE.

JOHNNY'S CAR SEIZES AN IMMEDIATE LEAD AND HOLDS ON.

I'M LEAVING THE OTHERS WAY BEHIND.

NOT BAD EITHER, CONSIDERING HOW LONG IT'S BEEN SINCE I'VE DONE ANY SERIOUS RACING.

TWENTY MINUTES INTO THE CONTEST AND NOTHING HAS CHANGED.

THE OTHERS DRIVE HARD AND FAST, BUT COMPARED TO JOHNNY, THEY ARE MIRED IN MOLASSES.

THE THIRD TIME INTO THE TUNNEL AND JOHNNY'S **NUMBER 17** HANGS ON TO A STRONG LEAD.

AND IT IS **17** FIRST OUT OF THE DARKNESS, TO THE JOYOUS WHOOPS OF THE CROWDS.

THEY DO NOT KNOW WHO IS DRIVING, ONLY THAT HE IS DRIVING **VERY WELL!**

UNTIL ...

JOHNNY!!

HE AIN'T FLYIN' AWAY FROM TH' WRECK.

WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED? HE'S GOTTA BE OKAY...

HE'S GOTTA!

UNHEEDING OF THE MERCILESS HEAT, THE MIGHTY-MUSCLED THING WADES INTO THE CONFLAGRATION.

JOHNNY! SPEAK TO ME KID!

AWFUL IMAGES FLASH ACROSS BEN GRIMM'S MIND. IMAGES FROM HIS DAYS AS A TEST-PILOT.

HE HAS SEEN FIRES LIKE THIS BEFORE.

SEEN FRIENDS CONSUMED IN THE AWFUL, IMPARTIAL FLAMES.

AND TODAY, ANOTHER FRIEND SEEMS TO HAVE MET THE SAME FATE...

...FOR WHATEVER REMAINS OF **THE DRIVER** IS NOW...

... BURNED BEYOND RECOGNITION.

SOON...

EASY, MR. GRIMM. I DON'T KNOW IF THIS MEDICATION WILL DO ANY GOOD ON YOUR HIDE, BUT WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING WITH THESE BURNS.

JUST DO TH' BEST YA CAN, KID. I'VE HAD A LOT WORSE HAPPEN TA ME SINCE I GOT ZAPPED INTA THIS BOD BY THEM **COSMIC RAYS.**

THE AFTERMATH OF TRAGEDY. TWO HOURS AFTER THE CRASH THE WRECK HAS COOLED SUFFICIENTLY THAT CLEAN-UP CREWS MAY BEGIN THEIR GRIZZLY WORK.

THE BLACKENED HUSK THAT WAS ONCE A MAN IS TRANSFERRED FROM THE RUINED CAR TO A BODY-BAG, AND THENCE TO AN AMBULANCE, AND AWAY.

WELL, WHAT'S TH' WORD? YOUR GUYS FIGGERED OUT WHAT HAPPENED?

I'D SAY THAT'S PRETTY WELL OBVIOUS, MR. GRIMM. YOU GOT TO THE SCENE BEFORE ANYONE ELSE. YOU **SAW** WHAT WAS LEFT OF MR. STORM.

ANYWAY, YOU KNOW NO ONE COULD SURVIVE A CRASH LIKE THAT.

"WE AIN'T TALKIN' ABOUT JUST **ANYONE**, POPS. WE'RE TALKIN' ABOUT TH' ***HUMAN TORCH.***

"I'VE SEEN HIM BLOW JET FIGHTERS OUTTA THE AIR. AN' JET FUEL BURNS A LOT HOTTER AN' FASTER THAN GASOLINE.

"THERE JUST AIN'T NO WAY IN TH' WORLD THAT... *THING* THEY TOOK OUTTA TH' WRECK COULDA BIN JOHNNY. THERE MUSTA BIN A SWITCH."

OKAY, YOU TELL ME WHEN, GRIMM. BEFORE THE CRASH? OUT ON THE TRACK AT TWO HUNDRED-PLUS MILES PER HOUR?

LOOK, I REALIZE HOW HARD THIS MUST BE, AFTER ALL YOU'D BEEN THROUGH TOGETHER, BUT FACE THE FACTS, MAN.

THE HUMAN TORCH IS **DEAD!**

THEN, AS AN ANGRY AND CONFUSED THING MOVES INTO THE SURROUNDING AMUSEMENT PARK...

M-MISTER GRIMM? I'M JULIE D'ANGELO. I DON'T KNOW IF YOU REMEMBER ME...

D'ANGELO? SURE, YOU'RE THAT ACTRESS FRIEND OF... OF...

I... I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY, MR. GRIMM. IT'S JUST... *HORRIBLE!*

YEAH. WELL, SO FAR I AIN'T ALTOGETHER CONVINCED WHAT WE SAW HAPPEN REALLY HAPPENED.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? I REALIZE IT'S KIND OF *IRONIC* THAT JOHNNY SHOULD... DIE IN SOMETHING AS ORDINARY AS A CAR-CRASH AFTER ALL HE'S BEEN THROUGH...

NIRS

CAN

THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT. I *KNOW* THERE IS.

MEBBE IT'S JUST MY SUSPICIOUS NATURE, BUT I'M GONNA FIND THE TOP BOSS A' THIS JOINT AN' ASK ME SOME POINTED QUESTIONS.

THE TOP BOSS? YOU MEAN *ALDEN MAAS?* BUT HE'S A COMPLETE RECLUSE. NO ONE'S EVEN *SEEN* HIM IN-- MUST BE FIFTEEN YEARS NOW!

HE BUILT THAT BIG STAR-SHAPED, ARTIFICIAL ISLAND ABOUT TEN MILES OFF THE COAST AND JUST DROPPED OUT OF THE PUBLIC EYE.

AN ISLAND, HUH? WELL, THAT SHOULD BE EASY ENOUGH TO FIND. SEE YA AROUND, KID.

THUS, AFTER A FORTY MINUTE TAXI-RIDE TO THE SMALL AIRPORT WHERE THE THING AND TORCH LANDED THE DAY BEFORE...

...IT IS THE LONG-RANGE FANTASTICAR THAT FLASHES OUT OVER THE SPRAWL OF CALIFORNIA'S BEAUTIFUL BEACHES.

AND, WITHIN MINUTES...

THAT'S GOTTA BE THE ISLAND SHE MEANT. IT'S THE ONLY ONE EVEN SLIGHTLY STAR-SHAPED.

FUNNY. I WUZ EXPECTIN' SOMETHIN' MORE CLEARLY DEFINED, NOT JUST THE TREES AN' STUFF CUT T' TH' SHAPE.

WONDER IF THEY'VE GOT ANY GIZMOS TA LET 'EM KNOW COMPANY'S COMIN'?

I'LL LAND ON THE BEACH, NICE AN' OPEN AN' FRIENDLY.

IF I HAFTA GET *NASTY*-- WELL, THERE'LL BE TIME FOR THAT LATER.

THEN, AFTER SEVERAL LONG MINUTES HAVE TICKED BY...

HM.

GUESS THEY DON'T HAVE ANY RADAR OR STUFF LIKE THAT, OR I'D SURELY HAVE BEEN MET BY...

GOOD MORNING, SIR!

AM I CORRECT TO ASSUME THAT I HAVE THE PLEASURE OF ADDRESSING BENJAMIN GRIMM, ALSO KNOWN AS THE THING?

HUH? WHAT IS THIS? HAVE I DIED AN' GONE TA JUNIOR EXECUTIVE HEAVEN?

YEAH, I'M BEN GRIMM. I WANNA SEE TH' BIG BOSS, AN' NO GUFF!

OF COURSE. MR. MAAS DOES NOT NORMALLY RECEIVE VISITORS...

...BUT IN THE CASE OF SO ILLUSTRIOUS A GUEST I'M SURE AN EXCEPTION CAN BE MADE.

15.

FOR A FEW MINUTES THE CURIOUS PARTY FOLLOWS A SMALL PATH MEANDERING THROUGH THE TREES.

MAN-O-MAN, LOOK AT THIS JOINT! MAKES THE OL' BAXTER BUILDING LOOK LIKE A LEAN-TO!

AND, WITHIN THE GLEAMING, ULTRAMODERN STRUCTURE...

...A STUDY IN CONTRASTS.

PLEASE WAIT HERE, MR. GRIMM.

ALL YOUR QUESTIONS WILL BE ANSWERED IN JUST A FEW MOMENTS.

QUESTIONS? I AIN'T ASKED ANY...

HEL-LO...

GOOD DAY, AND WELCOME TO *PROJECT WORLDCORE*, WHERE TOMORROW STARTS TODAY!

PING!

HMPH! A *HOLOGRAM!* WHAT NEXT? COUPL'A' CUTE DROIDS AN' A HEAVY BREATHER IN BLACK?

PROJECT WORLDCORE IS THE MOST AMBITIOUS VENTURE EVER UNDERTAKEN BY THE WONDERWORLD FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS CREATOR, ALDEN MAAS.

YOU ARE THE FIRST PEOPLE TO LEARN THE FULL SCOPE OF THE PROJECT, AND WE HOPE YOU ARE AS HONORED TO HEAR IT AS WE ARE TO TELL IT.

THE VOICE HAS THE CONDESCENDING SING-SONG RHYTHM OF A KIDDIE-SHOW HOSTESS.

AT THE HEART OF THE PROJECT LIES MR. MAAS' DEDUCTION THAT MODERN CONCEPTS OF CONTINENTAL DRIFT ARE COMPLETELY WRONG.

THE GREAT LAND MASSES ARE *NOT* SIMPLY MOVING RELATIVE TO EACH OTHER BECAUSE THEY FLOAT ON THE MANTLE!

RATHER THE TREMENDOUS HEAT OF THE CORE IS *EXPANDING* THEIR GLOBE LIKE A BALLOON.

"BUT THE EARTH'S CORE HAS *COOLED* OVER THE MILLIONS AND BILLIONS OF YEARS OF ITS LIFE.

"BECAUSE OF THAT, THE EXPANSION HAS SLOWED ALMOST TO A STOP -- AND, SINCE PEOPLE CONTINUE TO HAVE LOTS AND LOTS OF BABIES...

STANDING ROOM ONLY!!

"...SOON ALL THE AVAILABLE SPACE ON EARTH WILL BE *FILLED UP!*

"BUT HERE AT PROJECT WORLDCORE STEPS ARE BEING TAKEN TO CORRECT THIS.

"A SPECIAL SHAFT HAS BEEN DRILLED...

"...ALL THE WAY TO THE POOR OLD CORE.

"AND DOWN THAT SHAFT WILL BE PUMPED LOTS AND LOTS OF LOVELY *HEAT.*

"THE CORE WILL BE REKINDLED, EVEN *HOTTER* THAN BEFORE.

"AND, ONCE AGAIN, LIKE A GIANT BALLOON, THE EARTH WILL GROW AND GROW AND *GROW*...

"...UNTIL THERE'S LOTS OF ROOM FOR EVERYBODY!"

IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL A SOURCE OF TREMENDOUS *HEAT* WAS NEEDED.

A CONTROLLABLE SOURCE OF HEAT EQUAL TO THAT OF AN EXPLODING STAR.

WE FOUND SUCH A SOURCE.

HUH? A SLIDIN' PANEL IN THAT WALL...

JOHNNY!

"WHAT BETTER SOURCE THAN A LIVING BEING, ONE WHOSE METABOLISM COULD BE REGULATED ARTIFICIALLY...

"SO AS TO GENERATE THE EXACT QUANTITIES AND QUALITIES OF HEAT REQUIRED."

ARRGH!!

HOLY CATS! THEY'RE *KILLIN' HIM!* AN' DYIN' ONCE IN ONE DAY IS ENOUGH!

HANG ON, KID! I'M COMIN'! *IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!*

NO!

HUH?

PLEASE RESTRAIN YOURSELF, MR. GRIMM. AN ASSAULT ON THAT PANEL WILL AVAIL YOU NOUGHT.

ALDEN MAAS! THE BIG KAHUNA HIMSELF. IF YOU DON'T WANT ME PULVERIZIN' THIS JOINT, YA BETTER GET JOHNNY *OFF* THAT CONTRAPTION.

ALL IN DUE COURSE, MR. GRIMM. THE POWER OF THE HUMAN TORCH MUST FIRST BE PUT TO GOOD AND PROPER USE, REKINDLING THE LOST HEAT OF OUR PLANET'S CORE.

BUT THAT'S HIS *NOVA FLAME* YA TURNED ON, YA BLASTED IDJIT! HE CAN ONLY BURN LIKE THAT FER A FEW *SECONDS WITHOUT* KILLIN' HIMSELF!

OR DON'T ONE HUMAN LIFE COUNT IN THIS NUTSO PLAN?

THE BALANCING OF THE *ONE* AGAINST THE *MANY* IS EVER THE TASK THAT BEFALLS THOSE OF US ELEVATED TO POSITIONS OF GREAT EARTHLY RESPONSIBILITY, SIR.

IF THE HUMAN TORCH INDEED PERISHES, A MONUMENT SHALL BE ERECTED TO COMMEMORATE HIS NOBLE SACRIFICE. BUT, I BEG YOU, DO NOT INTERFERE.

I KNOW WELL WHAT I AM DOING, KNOW WELL THE PATH I MUST TREAD, FOR I AM THE APPOINTED *SAVIOUR* OF ALL MANKIND, MR. GRIMM.

I AM THE *MESSIAH!*

THE MESSIAH?! OKAY, THAT DOES IT! FIRST I'M GONNA BUST JOHNNY OUTTA THAT HORROR-BOX...

...THEN I'M GONNA TEACH YOU A LITTLE HUMILITY.

GRIMM! NO! DON'T!

SAVE IT, PAL! I AIN'T...

...LISTENIN'...

SKRASKT

AW, NUTS!

JOHNNY WUZ ANOTHER BLASTED HOLOGRAM!

AN' NOW I'M FALLIN' RIGHT DOWN TH' MIDDLE A' THAT SHAFT THEY WUZ TALKIN' ABOUT.

NO WAY I BELIEVE IT GOES ALL THE WAY T' THE EARTH'S CORE...

...BUT IT LOOKS LIKE IT GOES DOWN FAR ENOUGH TA *FINISH* ME OFF.

SORRY, TORCHIE. LOOKS LIKE I LET YA DOWN IN A BIG WAY THIS TIME.

THEN, AFTER WHAT SEEMS AN ETERNITY...

OOF!

UNGH!

I... DON'T BELIEVE IT! I'M STILL BREATHIN'!

BUT ONLY JUST. GOTTA... REST FOR A SEC...

GOTTA...

ARGHH!

SKTZT

I KNEW IT! I KNEW IT! I KNEW THE ACCURSED *FANTASTIC FOUR* WOULD BE A PART OF THIS!

BUT THIS TIME THEY HAVE GONE TOO FAR! THIS TIME ALL THE SURFACE WORLD WILL *PAY* FOR THEIR CRIMES!

SO SPEAKS THE **MOLE MAN!**

NEXT ISSUE:

THERE ARE STILL A LOT OF QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED, AND MORE ON THE WAY! BE HERE IN THIRTY DAYS FOR...

INFERNO!

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

Fantastic Four®

THE MOLE MAN'S MONSTER! IT'S ATTACKING AGAIN!

TORCH, WAIT! THIS TIME IT'S ON OUR SIDE!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

JOHN BYRNE STORY & ART / MICHAEL HIGGINS LETTERING / JULIANNA FERRITER COLORING / BOB BUDIANSKY EDITING / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR IN CHIEF

CARRY HIM CAREFULLY, MY MINDLESS SLAVES. DO NOT HARM HIM AS YOU TRANSPORT HIM INTO THE DEEP, DARK BOSOM OF THE EARTH.

I DO NOT WISH HIM HURT IN ANY WAY... UNTIL THE MOMENT WHEN HE *DIES!*

AT FIRST, THE WORDS FILTER THROUGH ONLY VAGUELY... SCRAPS AND DISJOINTED SYLLABLES THAT MAKE NO SENSE.

UNDERGROUND

THIS WAY! THIS WAY! DO NOT LET HIM FALL INTO THE BLAZING *LAVA*. THAT IS NOT TO BE HIS FATE.

NOT YET!

THE VOICE IS A NASAL WHINE, PICKING AT THE EDGES OF HIS CONSCIOUSNESS LIKE AN ITCH ONE IS UNABLE TO SCRATCH.

FINALLY, BEN GRIMM FIGHTS HIS WAY BACK FROM MURKY UNCONSCIOUSNESS INTO DIMLY LIT REALITY.

WHAT'S GOIN' ON? WHERE AM I? WHY...?

HE IS CONSCIOUS. *EXCELLENT!* HURRY NOW, MY SLAVES. BRING HIM TO THE PLACE OF *EXECUTION* BEFORE THE ELECTRO-PARALYSIS WEARS OFF.

TINY HANDS, ROUGH AND SINEWY-STRONG LIFT HIM ONTO THE HOT, STONE SLAB.

BENEATH HIS FOUR HUNDRED POUNDS AN ANCIENT ROCKY HINGE GROANS A FEEBLE PROTEST.

M-MOLE MAN... HOW DID YOU GET... MIXED UP... IN THIS MESS? WHY'RE... YA... DOIN' THIS... TA ME?

YOU DARE? YOU DARE MOCK ME WITH SUCH A QUESTION?

"I HAD MADE MY *PEACE* WITH YOU OF THE *FANTASTIC FOUR*, AS I HAD AT LAST MADE MY PEACE WITH ALL THE ACCURSED SURFACE WORLD.

"I HAD GATHERED TO MY UNDERGROUND KINGDOM ALL THE OUTCASTS, THE PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY DEFORMED, SPURNED BY THEIR FELLOW MEN, AS *I* HAD BEEN SPURNED.*

"I HAD CREATED FOR THEM A *UTOPIA* OF PEACE AND BEAUTY.

*AS SEEN IN *FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL #13*--Bob.

"THEN ONE DAY, IN THE WESTERN REGIONS OF MY REALM...

"A GIANT DRILL-BIT RIPPED THROUGH TO THE SEETHING *MAGMA HEART* OF OUR PLANET, UNLEASHING THE BOILING, MOLTEN ROCK.

"IT FLOODED THROUGH MY TUNNELS, A GREAT, UNENDING RIVER OF LIQUID ROCK, SEARING ALL IN ITS PATH.

"THE UNUTTERABLE DEVASTATION SUFFERED BY MY OUTCASTS, MY SUBTERRANEANS... I CANNOT DESCRIBE.

"MY DREAMS OF PEACE AND TRANQUILITY WERE BURNT AWAY.

"AND AS I LOOKED UPON THE TERRIBLE SEA OF LAVA I SWORE I WOULD HAVE MY *VENGEANCE* UPON THOSE RESPONSIBLE!"

BUT, WHEN I CAME HERE TO INVESTIGATE, WHAT DID I FIND?

I FOUND ***YOU! THE THING!*** ONE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN YOU WOULD FIND A WAY TO DESTROY MY DREAMS.

M-MOLE, LISTEN TA ME...

HE STRUGGLES AGAINST THE PARALYSIS THAT GRIPS HIS ROCK-LIKE FORM.

LISTEN... YA GOT IT ALL WRONG. THE FF WUZ ***GLAD*** WHEN YA... MENDED YER WAYS.

WE WUZ... ***HAPPY*** TA SEE YA SET UP YER LITTLE KINGDOM...

"WE AIN'T THE ONES WHO CAUSED ALL THAT DESTRUCTION AND DEATH.

"THE REAL VILLAIN IS ***ALDEN MAAS,*** THE CREATOR OF ***WONDERWORLD*** AMUSEMENT PARK. *

*AS SHOWN LAST ISSUE-- Bob.

"HE'S GOT THIS CRAZY IDEA TH' EARTH IS SUPPOSED T'BE ***EXPANDIN',*** AN' HE THINKS THAT CAUSES CONTINENTAL DRIFT.

"AN' HE'S SNATCHED MY PARTNER, TH' ***HUMAN TORCH,*** TA USE HIS FLAME POWERS...

"...TA FIRE A BLAST OF ***NOVA HOT*** FLAME INTA THE EARTH'S CORE...

"...TA SUPER-HEAT IT, AND EXPAND TH'EARTH--INCREASE ITS LAND AREA.'"

ALDEN MAAS? YES, I REMEMBER HIM. HE HAD BECOME A BILLIONAIRE RECLUSE EVEN BEFORE I CAME TO MY UNDER-GROUND WORLD.

BUT YOU CANNOT EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE THAT EVEN A PANDERING ***FANTASY MERCHANT*** SUCH AS HIM COULD HAVE CONCOCTED SO OUTLANDISH A PLAN.

THE EARTH WOULD NOT EXPAND. THE CRUST WOULD ***RUPTURE.*** ALL THE SURFACE WOULD BE INUNDATED.

THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT. THAT'S WHY HE'S GOTTA BE ***STOPPED!*** BEFORE BILLIONS A' PEOPLE GET KILLED. THAT'S WHY... WHY YOU GOTTA ***HELP ME!***

HELP YOU? ARE YOU ***MAD?***

I MEAN TO ***EXECUTE*** YOU.

"EVEN NOW MY SUBTERRANEANS POSITION THE INSTRUMENT OF YOUR DEATH --

"--A GIANT BOULDER CAREFULLY BALANCED ON THE LEDGE ABOVE US."

IT WILL ROLL DOWN ITS CARVED CHANNEL TO STRIKE THE END OF THE SLAB ON WHICH YOU LIE HELP-LESSLY...

...AND YOU WILL BE HURLED INTO THE SEA OF LAVA BEYOND THIS PLATEAU.

'AN THAT'D COOK EVEN ***ME.***

O... KAY, MOLE. ONE WAY... OR ANOTHER... I'M GONNA MAKE YA LISTEN!

MEANWHILE...

EVEN AS THE MIGHTY-MUSCLED **THING** TURNS EVERY IOTA OF HIS COSMIC RAY-SPAWNED STRENGTH TO THE TASK OF OVERCOMING THE PARALYSIS WHICH GRIPS HIM...

ACROSS THE CONTINENT A FAMILIAR VEHICLE RISES FROM THE HANGAR DECK ATOP THE FAR-FAMED **BAXTER BUILDING.**

AT THE CONTROLS IS **REED RICHARDS,** THE MAN CALLED **MISTER FANTASTIC,** LONG-TIME FRIEND OF BEN GRIMM AND LEADER OF THE **FANTASTIC FOUR.**

THE AUTOMATED SCANNERS HAVE BEEN PICKING UP AN UNIDENTIFIED ENERGY GLICH HERE IN **MANHATTAN** FOR SEVERAL DAYS NOW.

BUT THIS LATEST OCCURRENCE IS AT LEAST PARTIALLY DIRECTIONAL. IT CAME FROM SOMEWHERE IN **CENTRAL PARK.**

"SOMEWHERE IN CENTRAL PARK..."

ONLY A NEW YORKER CAN TRULY APPRECIATE THE ENORMITY OF THOSE WORDS. TWO AND A HALF MILES LONG, HALF A MILE WIDE, THE PARK COVERS 840 ACRES IN THE VERY HEART OF MANHATTAN.

AND AS REED RICHARDS CIRCLES AND RECIRCLES THE OCEAN OF GREENERY, HE REALIZES THE TASK HE HAS SET FOR HIMSELF HAS NIGH-PROVERBIAL PROPORTIONS.

HE IS SEEKING A FLEETING ENERGY **NEEDLE** IN A MOST FRUSTRATING **HAYSTACK.**

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE THERE WERE ACTUAL SHEEP GRAZING ON THE ROLLING GRASSES OF THE **SHEEP MEADOW...**

...BUT THE GATHERED PICNICKERS ARE SURELY NO LESS ASTONISHED BY THE ARRIVAL OF THE **FANTASTICAR** THAN THOSE FOUR-LEGGED CREATURES WOULD HAVE BEEN.

TYPICALLY HEEDLESS OF THE STIR HIS VERY PRESENCE CREATES, REED RICHARDS DIRECTS HIS PHENOMENAL INTELLECT TO MORE PRESSING CONCERNS THIS DAY.

THIS PORTABLE **DIO-ETHERIC SCANNER** SHOULD BE ABLE TO MONITOR THE PRECISE SOURCE OF THE ENERGY FLUCTUATIONS.

AT LEAST I **HOPE** IT WILL. I ONLY HAD A FEW MINUTES TO COBBLE IT TOGETHER BEFORE THE ALARM SOUNDED.*

*LAST ISSUE. --Bob.

BUT...

NO GOOD. THE SCANNER IS FUNCTIONING PERFECTLY, BUT THE AREA IS CLEAN.

IF ONLY I COULD HAVE GOTTEN HERE SOONER. SOMETHING ABOUT THE ENERGIES SEEMED ALMOST... INTELLIGENT. I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING IT WAS **SEARCHING.**

AND, I SUSPECT, SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING THAT WILL HAVE TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PEOPLE OF **EARTH.**

*AND YOU CAN SEE THE MYSTERY BEGIN TO UNRAVEL IN **THE THING #10,** ON SALE IN ONE WEEK. --Bob.

MEANWHILE, ON A QUIET STREET IN SUBURBAN **BELLE PORTE,** CONNECTICUT...

MRS. **BENJAMIN?** ARE YOU HOME, MRS. BENJAMIN?

IS THAT YOU, **KATE?**

YES, I'VE BROUGHT **FRANKLIN** HOME FROM THE PLAY-GROUND.

GOOD... GOOD GIRL. THERE ARE SOME MILK AND COOKIES IN THE KITCHEN. HELP YOURSELVES.

I'LL BE DOWN IN JUST A MINUTE...

...I HOPE...

WITH THE BEDROOM DOOR CLOSED, A COOL SILENCE SETTLES OVER SUSAN BENJAMIN -- **A.K.A. SUSAN STORM RICHARDS, THE INVISIBLE GIRL!** *

SILENCE... BUT NOT RELIEF.

THIS IS THE WORST ONE YET.

POP POP

THESE SPASMS HAVE BEEN COMING CLOSER AND CLOSER TOGETHER.

*THE RICHARDS FAMILY USES THE NAME BENJAMIN TO HIDE THEIR IDENTITIES FROM THEIR NEIGHBORS. -- Bob.

IF ONLY MY PREGNANCY WITH FRANKLIN HAD BEEN MORE... NORMAL.

I HAVE NO IDEA IF THIS PAIN IS NATURAL AT THIS STAGE.

IT'S **AWFUL**. IT MAKES ME FEEL LIKE SUCH A **CHILD**... NOT KNOWING, BEING **AFRAID**.

I'VE GOT TO GET INTO THE CITY, HAVE REED RUN AN EXAMINATION WITH THE INSTRUMENTS IN THE BAXTER BUILDING.

AND THEN...

AS SUDDENLY AS IT HAD COME, THE PAIN IS GONE, LEAVING SUSAN WEAK AND BATHED IN PERSPIRATION, BUT OTHERWISE...

I'M **FINE** AGAIN!

IT'S BIZARRE... AS IF NOTHING WAS WRONG AT ALL.

AND A FEW MINUTES LATER A DISGUISED MRS. BENJAMIN ARRIVES DOWNSTAIRS.

HELLO, KIDS. DID YOU HAVE A GOOD TIME PLAYING, FRANKLIN?

YES, MOMMY, IT WAS LOTS OF FUN.

ELSEWHERE...

IN A HIDDEN CHAMBER, ON AN ISLAND TEN MILES OFF THE COAST OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ...

SOME VACATION ***THIS*** HAS TURNED OUT TO BE...

VAINLY, THE ***HUMAN TORCH*** FIGHTS AGAINST THE NUMBING FATIGUE THAT MAKES IT A ***HERCULEAN*** EFFORT EVEN TO RAISE HIS HEAD...

BEN AND I CAME OUT HERE FOR SOME FUN AND SUN...

INSTEAD I END UP GETTING ***SNATCHED*** BY A BOZO WITH A ***MESSIAH COMPLEX.****

AN' STRAPPED INTO THIS GIZMO THAT ROBS ME OF CONTROL OF MY POWER.

*LAST ISSUE. --Bob.

UH-OH! HERE COMES ONE OF ***MAAS'*** FEMALE FLUNKIES.

LISTEN TO ME, ***PLEASE!*** YOU'RE TAXING MY POWER TOO MUCH. YOU'LL ***KILL*** ME!

OH, I ASSURE YOU, WE WON'T DO THAT, MR. STORM.

YOU ARE FAR TOO VITAL AN ELEMENT OF THE ***MESSIAH'S*** PLAN FOR US TO ALLOW ANY HARM TO BEFALL YOU.

MR. MAAS HAS CALCULATED THE PRECISE AMOUNT OF TIME YOU NEED TO RE-CUPERATE FROM EACH ***NOVA BLAST.***

AND THAT TIME HAS NOW PASSED, SO, SINCE THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO FIRE UP THE CORE WAS UN-SUCCESSFUL...

...IT'S TIME TO TRY AGAIN!

HER VOICE HAS THE SAME SYRUPY SING-SONG SWEETNESS THAT THE **THING** HEARD WHEN HER HOLOGRAM IMAGE SPOKE TO HIM EARLIER.*

THEN, BEFORE THE FATEFUL SWITCH CAN BE THROWN...

*LAST ISSUE AGAIN -- Bob.

WITH INCREDIBLE SPEED THE HARD YELLOW HANDS DRAG HER INTO THE SUDDEN OPENING.

SHE HAS NO CHANCE TO SOUND AN ALARM BEFORE SHE IS SILENCED AND SPIRITED AWAY.

AND THEN...

EXCELLENT, MY SLAVES. YOU HAVE LOCATED THE ***EXACT*** CHAMBER.

THE MOLE MAN!

DON'T TELL ME YOU'VE GOT YOUR BIG NOSE IN THIS, **TOO?**

CAN THE WISECRACKS, JUNIOR. IT'S TAKEN ME QUITE A WHILE TA CONVINCE HIM WE'RE ON ***HIS*** SIDE THIS TIME.

DON'T BLOW IT!

WISE WORDS, BEN GRIMM. I AM STILL NOT WHOLLY CONVINCED.

SLAVES, FREE THE HUMAN TORCH.

AND, WITHIN SECONDS...

HEY--YOU **SURE** ABOUT THIS, BEN? IT'S ONE THING TO SAY MOLE'S ON OUR SIDE, BUT BEING TOUCHED BY THESE GUYS STILL GIVES ME THE CREEPS.

YEAH, WELL DON'T GO ALL **DELICATE** ON ME NOW, TORCHIE. HOW ARE YA FEELIN'? CAN YA FLAME ON YET?

JUST ABOUT. I'VE REALLY HAD MY POWER PUT THROUGH THE WRINGER... ALTHOUGH I GUESS I SHOULD FEEL LUCKY TO BE **ALIVE.**

"THE WHOLE **WONDERWORLD GRAND PRIX** WAS A PLOY TO CAPTURE **ME.** *

"THE RACE TRACK TUNNEL WAS RIGGED SO THAT ON THE THIRD TIME ROUND MY CAR GOT SHUNTED INTO AN UNDERGROUND VACUUM CHAMBER, AND A DUPLICATE CAR HAD THE CRASH."

*LAST ISSUE-- Guess Who.

YEAH, I FIGGERED IT MUSTA BIN SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT. I JUST COULDN'T ACCEPT YOU WUZ **DEAD!**

TOUCHING...

...BUT A WASTE OF TIME. BY NOW THE CONTROLLERS OF THIS COMPLEX WILL HAVE REALIZED SOMETHING HAS DELAYED THE TORCH'S BLAST.

EVEN WITHOUT AN ALARM BEING SOUNDED THEY ARE CERTAIN TO SEND SOMEONE TO INVESTIGATE.

WE MUST BE READY!

SUBTERRANEANS FORWARD!!

AND, TRUE TO THE MOLE MAN'S WORDS...

WE'RE BEIN' ATTACKED!

BUT NOTHING COULD HAVE PREPARED THEM FOR THE IDENTITY OF THE ATTACKERS.

C'MON MEN! STOP THEM! FOR MISTER MAAS! FOR THE MESSIAH!

THE FAMILIAR CARTOON VOICES ECHO STRANGELY IN THE VAULTED CORRIDOR.

TOO STRANGELY FOR AT LEAST ONE OF THE COMBATANTS.

I KNEW IT! I KNEW THEY COULDN'T BE GUYS IN COSTUMES!

THEY'RE ROBOTS!

NICE GOIN', THING! WE CAN HANDLE THEM EASY!

FLAME ON!

GOOD SHOOTING, **MAXIE,** BUT EVEN WITH MY FLAME AT THIS LOW EBB I CAN STILL MELT YOUR BULLETS BEFORE THEY HIT.

SQUAWK!

JUST LIKE I CAN MELT **YOU!**

THE TRADITIONAL BANTER OF THE FF IS NOT MIRRORED BY THE MOLE MAN.

HIS DARK THOUGHTS HE CONSIGNS TO SILENCE.

MEANWHILE HIS SUBTERRANEAN SLAVES FIND THEMSELVES OUTMASSED IF NOT OUTNUMBERED.

LITTLE WORMIES, YOU'RE NO MATCH FOR **HOPALONG HIPPO!** TM

MAYBE NOT. BUT **I** AM.

THIS IS **WEIRD.** MAAS NEVER GOT TO QUITE THE LEVEL OF **DISNEY,** BUT HIS CARTOONS ARE REAL POPULAR.

I FEEL A LITTLE BIT LIKE I'M ATTACKIN' TH' **FLAG** OR **MOM'S APPLE PIE!**

NOT FAR AWAY...

I DON'T LIKE THIS, MR. SMITH. IT IS NOT AT ALL IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE *PLAN.*

QUITE SO, MR. JONES. BUT THEN WE HAD NOT CALCULATED THE PRESENCE OF THE *MOLE MAN* IN OUR CONTINGENCY PLANS.

THAT WAS A SERIOUS ERROR ON OUR PARTS. I FEAR IT MAY COST US VALUABLE TIME, IF NOT THE ENTIRE PROJECT.

THEN IT WOULD SEEM TIME FOR ME TO TAKE DIRECT CONTROL.

MR. MAAS! SIR, YOU SHOULD NOT BE OUT OF YOUR *E.A. CHAMBER.*

NEVER MIND THAT, JONES. GIVE ME THE FULL DETAILS ON THE PROBLEM.

IN A FLAT, UNEMOTIONAL MONOTONE, JONES COMPLIES.

...SO YOU SEE, SIR, THE PLAN IS, AT THE MOMENT, IN A POSITION OF EXTREME JEOPARDY.

WE CANNOT ALLOW THAT, MR. JONES. THE SALVATION OF MANKIND MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO TOTTER AND FALL AT THIS STAGE, SO CLOSE TO THE ULTIMATE GOAL.

PREPARE THE *THERMO-NUCLEAR DEVICE.* IT IS DANGEROUS, AND NOT AS EFFICIENT AS THE TORCH'S NOVA FLAME...

...BUT IT IS THE *LAST HOPE* OF MANKIND.

AND...

WELL, LOOKS LIKE MAAS HAS RUN OUTTA ROBOT FUNNY ANIMALS.

'BOUT TIME, TOO. I WUZ STARTIN' TA FEEL LIKE THE CHAIRMAN OF *ACTION FOR CHILDREN'S TELEVISION.*

LOOKS LIKE WE'RE GETTING NEAR THE NITTY-GRITTY...

THAT DOOR LOOKS BIG ENOUGH TO GIVE EVEN YOU SOME PROBLEMS, BIG GUY.

YEAH, IT MAY SLOW US DOWN A BIT.

MORE THAN "A BIT". IT IS AT LEAST FIFTEEN FEET THICK.

BUT THERE IS NO NEED TO WASTE TIME...

THE SILVERY WHISTLE BARELY TICKLES THE EDGE OF PERCEPTION.

FOR SEVERAL MINUTES NOTHING SEEMS TO HAPPEN.

AWRIGHT, MOLE, WHAT'S YER GAME.

UNHAND ME!

THING! DON'T! YOU GOTTA TRUST HIM-- LIKE YOU TOLD ME TO!

THEN...

WHAT TH'...?

WITH A SOUND LIKE A HUNDRED EARTHQUAKES THE GIANT CREATURE TEARS THROUGH THE REINFORCED FLOORING...

ITS PALE EYES SQUINT AND BLINK, AND FOR A MOMENT THERE IS SOMETHING LIKE A FLICKER OF RECOGNITION DEEP WITHIN THEM...

...FOR THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAVE ENCOUNTERED THIS BEAST BEFORE, YEARS AGO WHEN THEY FIRST MET AND BATTLED THE MOLE MAN'S HORDES.

BUT THE CREATURE HASN'T THE TIME TO TRY TO DRAW FROM ITS BRUTISH BRAIN THE DIM MEMORIES OF THOSE IT NOW SEES.

ALMOST AT ONCE THE MOLE MAN'S WHINY VOICE IS RAISED IN HARSH COMMANDS.

AND, LIKE SOME OUTLANDISH LAP-DOG, THE MONSTER OBEYS.

WHAT FOLLOWS CAN IN NO WAY BE DESCRIBED AS DELIBERATE.

THERE IS NO THOUGHT, NO LOGIC, NO TACTICAL PLANNING BEHIND THE MONSTER'S MOVEMENTS.

THERE IS ONLY **DIRECTION**...

"...FORWARD, AND EVER FURTHER FORWARD, NO MATTER WHAT MIGHT BAR THE WAY.

HOLY...! HE'S TEARIN' RIGHT THROUGH **STEEL** LIKE IT WAS CARDBOARD!

EVEN THE MIGHTY-MUSCLED **THING** CAN ONLY STAND AND GAPE BEFORE SUCH POWER UNLEASHED.

IN THE END THE TINY HUMANS MUST RESIGN THEMSELVES TO THE ROLE OF FOLLOWERS, PICKING THEIR WAY ALONG A HIGHWAY OF RUBBLE.

IT IS A POSITION NOT AT ALL FAMILIAR OR COMFORTABLE TO THE TWO MOST FLAMBOYANT MEMBERS OF THE EARTH'S MOST AMAZING QUARTET.

AND...

THIS IS QUITE DISTRESSING, MR. JONES. I FEAR THE INTRUDERS MAY REACH US.

THAT IS PRESENTLY THE LEAST OF OUR CONCERNS, MR. SMITH. MR. MAAS IS DETERIORATING RAPIDLY. WE MUST RETURN HIM TO THE E.A. CHAMBER.

NO!!! NO. LISTEN TO ME.

MY *LIFE* IS NOT IMPORTANT. DO YOU UNDERSTAND? ***MY LIFE IS NOT IMPORTANT.*** ONLY THE PROJECT IS IMPORTANT. ONLY THE ***DREAM.***

AS YOU WISH, SIR. BUT IF YOU COULD PLEASE TAKE MORE CARE OF...

THERE IS NO LONGER TIME FOR SUCH CONSIDERATIONS. IS THE NUCLEAR DEVICE PREPARED, MR. BROWN?

THE MASTER CONTROL CIRCUIT HAS BEEN PRIMED, SIR. IT REMAINS ONLY FOR THE SWITCH TO BE THROWN.

LET ME HELP YOU, SIR...

QUICKLY, MR. JONES. I HAVE ONLY ***SECONDS*** LEFT. I MUST REACH THE SWITCH. I MUST SEE THE CULMINATION OF THE DREAM SET IN MOTION BY MY OWN HAND.

I AM THE ***MESSIAH, THE SAVIOR. I MUST*** PREVAIL!

AND, AS THE TREMBLING, PALSIED HAND GROPES FOR THE SWITCH...

THE MOLE MAN'S MONSTROUS SLAVE BURSTS BLINKING INTO THE BRIGHT CALIFORNIA SUN.

BUT THE THREE HUMANS ARE NO LONGER FOLLOWING.

THIS WAY! THE MAIN CONTROL CENTER'S GOTTA BE ALONG HERE.

HOW CAN YOU BE SO SURE?

'CAUSE OF THIS *DOOR*, HOT-SHOT.

WHAT ELSE'D NEED SUCH HEAVY PROTECTION?

BUT...

HOLY!

WHAT IN...?

MAAS?!?

YES, SIR, THIS IS ALDEN MAAS...

THE *LATE* ALDEN MAAS.

YOU MUST BE JOKING! YOU EXPECT US TO BELIEVE THIS DESSICATED CORPSE IS MAAS? THIS THING HAS BEEN DEAD FOR *TWENTY YEARS!*

SIXTEEN-POINT-OH-NINE-FIVE YEARS, SIR. MR. MAAS SUCCUMBED TO A DEGENERATIVE NERVOUS DISORDER, CHARACTERIZED BY FAILING METABOLIC FUNCTIONS AND DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR.

IN THE LAST YEAR OF HIS *TRUE LIFE* HE CAME TO THINK OF HIMSELF AS THE SAVIOR OF HUMANKIND, THE LIVING MESSIAH, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT BELIEVE HIMSELF A REINCARNATION OF THE *LAST* TO BEAR THAT TITLE.

AND SO HE BEGAN BUILDING ON THIS ISLAND THE MECHANISMS NECESSARY FOR *PROJECT WORLDCORE...*

...AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE *EXTENDED ANIMATION CHAMBER,* WHICH PROLONGED HIS EXISTENCE...

...UNTIL NOW.

WAIT A MINUTE... YOU MEAN YOU GUYS DID THIS KNOWING THE DANGER, THE POTENTIAL FOR DESTRUCTION?

THERE WAS NEVER ANY DANGER, SIR. EVEN HAD HE SUCCEEDED IN THE ACTIVATION OF IT...

THE THERMONUCLEAR DEVICE WOULD HAVE BEEN INSUFFICIENT TO FIRE THE CORE.

THEN... *WHY,* FER CRIPES SAKE, DIDJA GO ALONG WITH HIM?

TO KEEP HIM HAPPY AND CONTENTED, SIR...

...AS WE *WERE PROGRAMMED* TO DO.

EPILOG

SO THAT'S HOW IT ENDS, HUH? THEY JUST WALK OUT INTO THE OCEAN UNTIL THE PRESSURE CRUSHES THEM... AND WHAT'S LEFT OF MAAS.

KINDA *ANTICLIMACTIC*, AIN'T IT? WE WON... BUT NOTHIN' WOULDA BIN MUCH DIFFERENT IF WE *LOST*.

WE DID NOT *WIN*. I WAS DENIED MY *VENGEANCE*!

AW, DON'T BE SUCH A *GRUMP*, MOLE. IF WE'RE ALL GONNA BE *PALS* NOW...

TAKE YOUR PAW OFF ME, YOU RIDICULOUS *OAF*!

HUH? BUT I THOUGHT...

I RETURN NOW TO *SUBTERRANEA*, AS MY MONSTER HAS ALREADY DONE. BUT MY DREAMS OF AN UNDER-GROUND UTOPIA HAVE STILL BEEN CRUSHED. WHEN NEXT WE MEET...

... IT WILL NOT BE AS *FRIENDS*.

AND SO...

HEY, I JUST REALIZED WHY MAAS' ISLAND ISN'T STAR-SHAPED ANYMORE.

'CAUSE THEY DUMPED ALL THE EARTH FROM THE BORE-HOLE OFF-SHORE. I GUESSED THAT AS SOON AS I FOUND OUT WHAT THEY WUZ UP TA.

C'MON KID, TIME TA HEAD HOME. I FEEL LIKE BEIN' *DEPRESSED* FOR A WHILE.

OUR STORY GOES FROM HERE TO *THING #10* FOR THE BEGINNING OF A DRAMATIC CHANGE FOR THE FANTASTIC FOUR.

THEN BACK HERE FOR A DOUBLE-STORY ISSUE IN #265:

THE HOUSE THAT REED BUILT AND **HOME ARE THE HEROES**

DON'T MISS EITHER!

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THE THING™

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...THE ARENA OF NO RETURN!

WILSON/RUBINSTEIN

STAN LEE PRESENTS A TURNING POINT IN THE LIFE OF THE THING...

MARKING TIME

FORGET EVERYTHING YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT CENTRAL PARK.

CERTAINLY IT IS NOT A PLACE TO WANDER ALONE, IN THE SMALL HOURS OF MORNING. BUT ISN'T THAT TRUE OF ALMOST ANY-WHERE? ISN'T THERE A NEIGH-BORHOOD LIKE THAT IN YOUR HOME TOWN?

BUT CENTRAL PARK HAS CHANGED MUCH IN THE PAST FEW YEARS. THE TIME OF FEAR AND CRIME IS LARGELY PASSED. THE PEOPLE ARE TAKING BACK THE PARK. THE OLD FOLKS, THE KIDS, THE MOTHERS WITH THEIR BABIES, THE LIVING, BREATHING THRONGS OF THE CITY.

AND IN PARTICULAR, THESE TWO...

JOHN BYRNE
SCRIPTER

RON WILSON
PENCILER

HILARY BARTA, INKER

JIM NOVAK
LETTERER

JULIANNA FERRITER
COLORIST

BOB BUDIANSKY-EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER-TIMEKEEPER

HIS NAME IS **BEN GRIMM**, HERS **ALICIA MASTERS**, AND THEY ARE PERHAPS THE STRANGEST OF THE MANY COUPLES YOU MIGHT MEET IN THE PARK THIS AUTUMN AFTERNOON.

OH, BEN, IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL. THE SMELL OF THE LEAVES, THE CRISPNESS OF THE AIR. I LOVE THESE MOMENTS JUST BEFORE THE SEASONS CHANGE.

NEVER PAID ALL THAT MUCH ATTENTION, BABE. IT'S FUNNY HOW YOU, EVEN THOUGH YER *BLIND*... YOU SEEM TA APPRECIATE THINGS SO MUCH MORE'N I DO.

ONLY BECAUSE YOU WON'T ALLOW YOURSELF TO APPRECIATE THEM, DARLING. YOU DENY YOURSELF SO MUCH, LOCKING OUT THE WORLD THAT LOVES YOU, THAT RESPECTS AND HONORS YOU. LOCKING OUT SO MUCH BEAUTY AND LOVE.

I GOT ME ALL THE LOVE I NEED TUCKED UNDER MY ARM RIGHT NOW, BABY. AN' AS FER RESPECT... WELL, PEOPLE DON'T RESPECT LUMPY, ROCKY, *UGLY*, ORANGE MONSTERS. FEAR 'EM, MAYBE. CHEER 'EM WHEN THEY LAY THEIR LIVES ON THE LINE ONE MORE TIME TA SAVE THE WORLD.

BUT RESPECT? NAH. RESPECT IS FER BASEBALL PLAYERS AN' CONGRESSMEN.

US SUPER-FOLK JUST GET TH' LUMPS.

YOU STILL SOUND SO TROUBLED, BELOVED. PLEASE, CAN'T YOU LET ME INTO YOUR HEART? LET ME KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT TORMENTS YOU SO?

I WISH I COULD, ALICIA. YOU DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH I WISH I COULD.

BUT IT AIN'T THAT EASY. I BIN USIN' YOU FER A CRYIN' TOWEL FER A BIG PILE OF YEARS, AN' LATELY... WELL, LATELY IT JUST DON'T SEEM LIKE THAT'S ALTOGETHER FAIR.

LATELY IT SEEMS LIKE... MAYBE YOU AN' ME...

WELL, MAYBE WE'D BOTH DO ...BETTER WITHOUT THE OTHER.

B-BEN... YOU CAN'T MEAN...

I DUNNO WHAT I MEAN, BABY. I LOVE YOU. LOVE YOU WITH ALL MY HEART. YOU KNOW THAT.

BUT WHAT KINDA LIFE CAN I OFFER YOU? WE CAN'T EVER GET *MARRIED*. AT LEAST, NOT IN THE WAY REAL PEOPLE DO. TH' MOST I CAN OFFER IS OUR NAMES ON A PIECE OF PAPER.

AN'... WELL, YOU DESERVE A WHOLE LOT MORE THAN BEIN' THE GIRL-FRIEND OF A *FREAK!*

HOLY COW.

IT'S HIM! IT'S REALLY HIM! THE *THING!*

WHAT'S HE DOIN' HERE? SHOULDN'T HE BE OFF BEATIN' ON *DOC DOOM* OR SOMETHIN'?

HEY, WHERE YOU BEEN, SMARTIE? DOC DOOM IS *DEAD*. MY DAD READ IT IN THE PAPERS.

YEAH, WELL THAT'S STILL THE THING, AND WHERE HE GOES BAD GUYS FOLLOW!

THEN LET'S *US* FOLLOW.

WE MAY SEE SOMETHIN' SUPER-NEAT!

WHAT I'M TRYIN' TA SAY IN MY USUAL FUMBLE-FOOTED WAY IS...

HUH? WHERE DID ALL YOU KIDS COME FROM?

WHERE'D YA THINK, SUPER-GUY? DIDN'T ANYBODY EVER TELL YA ABOUT TH' *BIRDS AND TH' BEES?*

OH, CUTE. THAT'S JUST WHAT I NEED. A BUNCHA PINT-SIZED COMEDIANS.

TRASH IT

WHY DON'T YA GO PLAY IN HEAVY TRAFFIC OR SOMETHIN'?

BEN.

HEY, DON'T MIND CHUCK, MR. THING. WE JUST WANNA FOLLOW YOU AROUND AN' WATCH YA BEAT UP ON SOME BAD-GUYS!

YEAH? WELL, MAYBE I DON'T FEEL LIKE BEING FOLLOWED. DID YA THINK OF THAT?

OH, BEN, PLEASE TRY TO BE A LITTLE NICER. THEY'RE ONLY CHILDREN. FROM THE SOUNDS OF THEIR VOICES THEY'RE NOT MUCH OLDER THAN YOUR NEPHEW *FRANKLIN**.

HMPH.

*SON OF *REED* AND *SUE RICHARDS*, TWO OF THE *THING'S* PARTNERS IN THE *FANTASTIC FOUR* -- BOB.

YEAH, DON'T BE SUCH A GROUCH, MR. THING. SHOW US HOW STRONG YOU ARE!

YEAH, DO SOMETHING *STRONG!*

LISTEN, I AIN'T IN THE MOOD, OKAY? ME AN' MY LADY GOT STUFF TA DISCUSS. IF YA HAFTA FOLLOW, JUST STAY OUT FROM UNDER...

...FOOT.

OH!

ALICIA!

BABY, ARE YOU OKAY? YOU AIN'T HURT?

I'M... FINE, BEN. JUST A LITTLE STARTLED, THAT'S ALL.

YEAH, WELL YOU STAND RIGHT HERE FER A MINUTE...

THESE LITTLE TWERPS WANTED TA SEE THE THING IN ACTION...

I'M GONNA *SHOW 'EM!*

OH, BEN!

NO! WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?

I'M THINKIN'...

...THAT I'M SICK AN' TIRED OF BEING PESTERED WHERE-EVER I GO!

I'M THINKIN' MAYBE IT'S TIME I LET EVERYONE KNOW I AIN'T YOUR BASIC CELEBRITY WHO LOVES HIS ADORIN' FANS!

I'M THINKIN' I'D LIKE TA BE *ALONE!!*

O-OMIGOSH!

BEN... ALL THAT TERRIBLE CRUNCHING NOISE...!

BEN, IN HEAVEN'S NAME, WHAT DID YOU DO?!

NOTHIN'.

CENTRAL PARK JUST GOT REDUCED BY ONE PIGEON PERCH, IS ALL.

BUT JUST IN CASE THERE'S STILL SOME RUBBER-NECKERS WHO DIDN'T GET THE POINT OF THAT LITTLE DEMONSTRATION...

NOT TER

...YOU AN' ME ARE GOIN' SOMEWHERES WE CAN REALLY BE ON OUR OWN...

TAXI

...THE BAXTER BUILDING!

AFTERNOON, MR. GRIMM, MISS MASTERS.

HIYA, O'HOOLIHAN. SEE IF YA CAN KEEP THE GAWKERS AT BAY, WILL YA?

THE BUSTLING LOBBY GROWS STILL AND QUIET.

BUSINESS FOLK SLOW AND HALT IN THEIR DAILY ROUTINES AS THE THING PASSES AMONG THEM. EVEN AFTER ALL THE YEARS OF SHARING THIS MANHATTAN TOWER WITH THE **FANTASTIC FOUR**, THEIR REACTION TO THE SIGHT OF ONE OF EARTH'S GREATEST HEROES STILL IS A THRILL -- AND A SHUDDER.

HOLD ON A SEC, BABE.

LEMME ACTIVATE MY BELT-BUCKLE GIZMO AN' CALL DOWN THE FF'S PRIVATE ELEVATOR.

GHOST-LIKE, THE BEAM FLICKERS BRIEFLY TO THE CALL BUTTON.

SCARCELY VISIBLE IN THE SUNLIT LOBBY, THE SPECIAL RAY IS THE UNIQUE PRODUCT OF THE AMAZING INTELLECT OF REED RICHARDS, LEADER OF THE **FANTASTIC FOUR**, AND LONGTIME FRIEND OF BEN GRIMM.

OKAY, HERE'S TH' CAR. WATCH YER STEP KID.

SILENTLY, THE SPECIALLY DESIGNED ELEVATOR ZOOMS TO THE THIRTY-FIRST FLOOR RESIDENTIAL LEVEL, WHERE...

HEY, BEN YOU'RE LOOKING GLOOMY TO BEAT ALL...

OH, HI, ALICIA. DIDN'T SEE YOU FOR A MINUTE...

HELLO, JOHNNY. HOW ARE YOU TODAY?

I'M FINE. BUT YOUR BOYFRIEND LOOKS LIKE HE JUST GOT INVITED TO HIS OWN WAKE.

REAL FUNNY. THE WORLD'S FULLA COMEDIANS TODAY.

LEAVING THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE FF TO DESCEND IN THE ELEVATOR, BEN AND ALICIA PASS THROUGH THE SECURITY DOORS TO FIND...

STRETCHO! SUE! I THOUGHT YOU TWO WERE OFF PLAYIN' MR. AND MRS. AVERAGE AMERICAN IN THE 'BURBS!

THAT'S A CURIOUS WAY TO REFER TO OUR HOME IN ***CONNECTICUT***, BEN, BUT WE HAD IMPORTANT MATTERS TO ATTEND TO HERE IN TOWN.

YEAH? WHAT KINDA MATTERS?

WELL, FOR ONE THING SUE IS GETTING VERY NEAR HER TIME. THE BABY WILL BE BORN ANY DAY NOW, I SHOULD THINK, AND I WANTED TO RUN SOME TESTS.

*FOR A MOMENT THE FACE OF THE MAN CALLED **MISTER FANTASTIC** DARKENS...*

SINCE THIS CHILD WAS CONCEIVED WHILE WE WERE ALL IN THE ***NEGATIVE ZONE**** THE PROGRESS OF THE PREGNANCY MUST BE CAREFULLY MONITORED. WE CANNOT RISK A RECURRENCE OF THE COMPLICATIONS ENCOUNTERED WHEN ***FRANKLIN*** WAS BORN.

ALSO, THERE HAVE BEEN SOME PECULIAR ENERGY READINGS OVER CENTRAL PARK IN THE LAST FEW DAYS. I WANTED TO DOUBLE-CHECK MY INSTRUMENTS.

SEE ***FANTASTIC FOUR* #'S 251-256 -- BOB.*

CENTRAL PARK? YER BARKIN' UP TH' WRONG TREE, BIG BRAIN. ME AN' ALICIA JUST GOT BACK FROM THERE, AND IT'S PEACEFUL AS CAN BE.

AS IT WAS, WHEN I CHECKED IT MYSELF, NOT LONG AGO.* BUT IT ALWAYS PAYS TO BE CAREFUL AND SURE.

SEE ***FANTASTIC FOUR* #264 -- BOB.*

CAREFUL AN' SURE. CAREFUL AN' SURE. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I HEARD HIM SING ***THAT*** SONG IN THE LAST FEW YEARS?

SURE WISH HE'D BEEN THINKIN' THAT WAY WHEN WE ALL TOOK THAT ROCKET RIDE, AN' GOT ZAPPED BY THEM ***COSMIC RAYS.***

THE NEARLY SILENT HISS OF THE DOOR OPENING HERALDS BEN AND AND ALICIA INTO HIS PRIVATE QUARTERS.

HERE, THIRTY-ONE STORIES ABOVE THE BUSTLE OF MADISON AVENUE, THE MAN-TURNED-MONSTER FINDS OCCASIONAL RESPITE FROM THE DAILY PRESSURES OF BEING ONE-QUARTER OF EARTH'S MOST BELOVED SUPER-TEAM.

THE MEMORIES OF A LIFETIME ARE PACKED INTO THESE COMFORTABLE ROOMS. GOOD MEMORIES, BAD MEMORIES, FRAGMENTS OF LIFE AND DEATH, OF JOY AND SORROW.

HAPPY REMINDERS OF THE WAY THINGS WERE, SIDE BY SIDE WITH PAINFUL REMINDERS OF THE WAY THINGS **ARE.**

YEAH, REED'S TURNED INTA A REAL OL' WORRY-WART SINCE WE TOOK THAT LITTLE SPIN. FUNNY HOW A MAN CAN CHANGE.

BREAD

AS YOU HAVE CHANGED, BEN? CHANGED IN YOUR FEELINGS... TOWARD ME?

NO. I TOLDJA, BABE. THEM FEELIN'S AIN'T CHANGED. NOT A BIT.

I'VE LOVED YA SINCE THE FIRST DAY I EVER MET YA.* AN' I ALWAYS WILL LOVE YA.

*WAY BACK IN FF #9 -- BOB.

BUT IT AIN'T *LOVE* I'M TALKIN' ABOUT.

YOU'D BETTER GET COMFORTABLE, BABE. I FEEL A SPEECH COMIN' ON, AN' THAT DON'T HAPPEN OFTEN.

ALL RIGHT, MY DARLING. SAY WHATEVER IT IS YOU FEEL NEEDS TO BE SAID.

BEER

WELL, FIRST OFF, LET ME SAY IT ONE MORE TIME, JUST 'CAUSE I LIKE THE WAY IT SOUNDS.

I LOVE YOU, ALICIA. IF THERE WAS ANY WAY ON GOD'S GREEN EARTH TA DO IT, I'D MARRY YA AN' SETTLE DOWN TA RAISE A MESSA NORMAL KIDS.

BEER

BUT ODDS ARE THAT AIN'T POSSIBLE. THAT KINDA LIFE JUST AIN'T IN THE CARDS WE WUZ DEALT. AN' IT JUST DON'T SEEM FAIR NO MORE THAT I SHOULD DRAG YOU ALONG WITH ME ...KEEP YOU SHARIN' MY MISERY.

BEN, I...

NO, DON'T SAY NOTHIN', BABE. JUST LISTEN.

THIS AIN'T NOTHIN' NEW. I'D HOPED, A COUPLA WEEKS BACK WHEN IT SEEMED LIKE I'D FINALLY MANAGED TA COME TA TERMS WITH BEIN' WHAT I AM...*

...I'D HOPED I'D NEVER HAFTA THINK ABOUT THIS NO MORE. NEVER HAFTA PLAY THIS RECORD AGAIN...

*SEE *THING* #6 --GUESS WHO.

BUT IT SEEMS LIKE I'LL ALWAYS BE PLAYIN' IT...

SEEMS LIKE I ALWAYS HAVE BEEN PLAYIN' IT...

THE PICTURE IS A SIMPLE IMAGE...

FOUR FRIENDS, BROUGHT TOGETHER BY A COMMON GOAL, A COMMON NEED.

NEVER GUESSING WHAT LAY AHEAD OF THEM, NEVER GUESSING THAT THEIR CLANDESTINE FLIGHT TO THE STARS WOULD END IN NEAR TRAGEDY...

BOMBARDED BY A POTENTIALLY LETHAL DOSE OF **COSMIC RAYS**, THEY FOUND THEMSELVES RETURNED TO EARTH AND TRANSFORMED INTO...

...THE HUMAN TORCH...

...MISTER FANTASTIC...

...THE INVISIBLE GIRL...

...AND...

...A *THING!* A MONSTER! I'VE BECOME A MONSTER!

LISTEN TO ME, ALL OF YOU! THAT MEANS YOU TOO, BEN!

TOGETHER WE HAVE MORE POWER THAN ANY HUMANS HAVE EVER POSSESSED.

YA DON'T HAFTA MAKE A SPEECH, BIG SHOT. WE UNDERSTAND. WE GOTTA USE THAT POWER TA HELP MANKIND, RIGHT?

RIGHT, BEN. ABSOLUTELY RIGHT.

THUS, ON A LONELY, WOODED HILLSIDE NORTH OF **ITHACA, N.Y.**, A MOMENTOUS PLEDGE IS MADE. A PROMISE TO A FUTURE YET UNBORN...

WE MUST SWEAR TO USE OUR POWERS ONLY FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE HUMAN CONDITION...

BUT... WHERE IS BEN?

I AIN'T BEN ANYMORE. I'M THE *THING*.

AN'... I'M WITH YA. BUT DON'T ASK ME *WHY!*

SOMBER WORDS, AND BEFORE A REPLY CAN BE MADE ALL SPEECH IS DROWNED OUT BY THE FAMILIAR SOUND OF A HELI-COPTER...

BEN...

YA DON'T HAFTA SAY IT. I'LL MAKE MYSELF SCARCE FOR A BIT...

AND SO, ONLY THREE TRANSFORMED HUMANS ARE THERE TO GREET THE NEWCOMERS...

GET USED TA THIS, GRIMM. UNLESS THIS TRANSFORMATION WEARS OFF YER GONNA BE HIDIN' LIKE THIS FER A LONG TIME...

GENTLEMEN! GOOD TO SEE YOU. YOU MUST HAVE SEEN OUR... AH... LANDING.

LANDING? MISTER, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU WERE FLYIN', BUT THAT HAS TO HAVE BEEN THE BIGGEST BLAST SINCE... I DON'T KNOW WHAT.

WHO THE BLAZES ARE YOU PEOPLE?

AH... I WONDER IF YOU'D MIND TELLING US WHO *YOU* ARE FIRST? WE WERE ON A ...AH... SECURITY FLIGHT.

SECURITY? OKAY, WE'RE FROM THE *SENECA ARMY DEPOT*. WE'RE ALL CLEARED FOR SECURITY LEVEL 3B.

SENECA? THEN... THANK HEAVENS! THIS IS THE UNITED STATES!

I'M SORRY TO HAVE BEEN SO SECRETIVE, MEN! I'M REED RICHARDS, AND...

REED RICHARDS? THE BIG SHOT SCIENTIST FROM CALI-FORNIA? AIN'T YOU THE GUY WITH THE PRIVATE ROCKET BASE THAT MAKES CAPE CANAVERAL LOOK SICK?

THAT'S HIM, BRIGHT BOY. NOW LET'S STOW THE YAPPIN' AN GET OUTTA HERE.

HOLY.

IT'S SOME KINDA *MONSTER!* I READ ABOUT THINGS LIKE THAT...

BUT I AIN'T NEVER SEEN ONE...

WELL TAKE A GOOD LOOK, SOLDIER BOY! IT'LL BE SOMETHIN' TA TELL THE KIDDIES...

THE WORDS ARE ALMOST JOVIAL...

BUT SOMETHING BURNS IN THE SHADED BLUE EYES THAT MAKES ALL THOUGHT OF MIRTH EVAPORATE INTO THE COOL AUTUMN AIR...

SOMETHING THAT BREEDS PANIC.

LATER, OFFICIAL REPORTS OF THE INCIDENT WILL MAKE IT CLEAR THAT NO ONE ACTUALLY GAVE THE ORDER TO FIRE.

BUT THE FIRST SHOT TRIGGERS MANY MORE...

AND BEN GRIMM LEARNS HE HAS GAINED MORE THAN STRENGTH FROM HIS TRANS-FORMA-TION...

WHADDAYA KNOW. I HARDLY EVEN FELT THEM SLUGS...

BRAAKK!

BUT YOU BOYS ARE GONNA FEEL *THIS!*

BEN! NO!

BLAST IT, KEEP YER NOSE OUTTA THIS OR I'LL SNUFF YA LIKE A CRUMMY CANDLE!

BEN! GET A GRIP ON YOURSELF, MAN! THESE ARE AMERICAN SOLDIERS!

OUR SOLDIERS!

WHAT IN TH...

THAT CUTS IT! I'M SCRAMMIN' OUTTA HERE!

THIS IS TOO MUCH LIKE I WOKE UP IN THE MIDDLE OF A HORROR MOVIE!

WHAT'S THE RUSH, BOYS? YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LEAVE A GIRL STRANDED ARE YOU?

HUH? WHERE THE HECK DID YOU COME FROM?

WITH THE APPEARANCE OF THE BEAUTIFUL **INVISIBLE GIRL**, IT IS AS IF A SPELL IS BROKEN.

THE **THING** ALLOWS HIMSELF TO BE CALMED. THE SOLDIERS ACCEPT REED RICHARDS' PROMISE THAT HIS FRIEND WILL BEHAVE.

FEELING MUCH LIKE A CHILD WHO HAS RECEIVED A PARENTAL SCOLDING, BEN GRIMM CLIMBS INTO THE WAITING CHOPPER.

NO ONE FAILS TO NOTICE THE PONTOON'S CREAK OF PROTEST AS HIS WEIGHT BEARS BRIEFLY DOWN UPON IT.

TANGO ALPHA BRAVO TO CATBIRD SEAT. WE'VE PICKED UP FOUR, REPEAT, FOUR, SURVIVORS OF THE CRASH WE SIGHTED.

AND BOYS... YOU JUST AREN'T GONNA BELIEVE WHAT WE'RE BRINGING HOME.

THE LIGHT WORDS SEEM TO BRUSH AWAY FOR A MOMENT THE ENORMITY OF THE EVENTS OF WHICH THEY SPEAK.

BUT THEY CANNOT BRUSH AWAY THE FEELING THAT GROWS BIGGER AND BLACKER IN BEN GRIMM'S HEART AS HE SEES THE SOLDIERS, SEES EVEN HIS DEAR FRIENDS LEAN UNCONSCIOUSLY AWAY FROM HIM...

...AWAY FROM THE MONSTER HE HAS BECOME.

YEAH, THAT'S HOW IT ALL BEGAN. AN' FER A LONG TIME I THOUGHT MAYBE WE BURIED BEN GRIMM UP ON THAT HILLSIDE.

BURIED THE *MAN*. MAYBE FOREVER.

I MEAN, LOOK AT ALL THE TIMES REED'S COOKED UP SOME POTION, OR GADGET THAT WUZ SUPPOSED TA CURE ME, MAKE ME A MAN AGAIN. AN' EVERY TIME IT'S FAILED.

AN' LATELY...

WELL, LATELY IT SEEMS LIKE HE AIN'T EVEN TRYIN' NO MORE... *

*AN INSIGHT INTO **WHY** CAN BE FOUND IN FF #245 -- BOB.

ALICIA MASTERS LISTENS TO THE PAIN IN HER LOVED ONE'S VOICE.

IT IS ALMOST AS IF SHE HEARS IT FOR THE FIRST TIME, REALIZES AT LAST HOW DEEP ARE THE SCARS, HOW TERRIBLE IS THE HIDDEN DESPAIR...

BUT BEFORE SHE CAN OFFER WORDS OF SOLACE OR COMFORT...

BEN! THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE STILL HERE!

HUH? WHAT...?

SOMETHING STRANGE IS HAPPENING, BEN! I DON'T KNOW WHAT, OR HOW, BUT ALL THE INSTRUMENTS JUST SHOT RIGHT OFF THE DIAL.

WHATEVER THAT ENERGY WAS THAT I WAS MONITORING OVER CENTRAL PARK HAS JUST SWITCHED *FULL ON*.

AND IT'S AS IF THE FABRIC OF THE UNIVERSE HAS RIPPED WIDE OPEN.

OKAY, LEADER-MAN. I HEAR YA. SOUNDS LIKE WE GOTTA GO SAVE THE WORLD AGAIN. WHO KNOWS, MAYBE THIS TIME WE'LL EVEN GET A STATUE FER OUR TROUBLES.

IF THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE FUNNY, BEN, I'M AFRAID I MISS THE JOKE.

THE FANTASTICAR IS ALL WARMED UP. SUE IS TOO FAR ALONG TO GO ON THIS MISSION, SO SHE'LL STAY WITH ALICIA.

YEAH, SURE. TAKE CARE, BABY. I'LL... SEE YA...

THE BLIND SCULPTRESS DOES NOT HAVE TO SEE BEN GRIMM'S PAINED EXPRESSION TO HEAR THE HOLLOWNESS IN HIS WORDS.

BOTH MEN FEEL FOR A MOMENT AS IF THEY ARE HOVERING ON THE EDGE OF SOMETHING, SOMETHING WONDERFUL AND TERRIBLE...

SOMETHING THAT THEY SHOULD REACH OUT AND RESTRAIN, STOP IT FROM BLUNDERING ON TO ITS INEVITABLE CONCLUSION...

AND THEN THE MOMENT, LIKE THE MEN, IS GONE...

ALICIA...

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, DEAR? BEN SOUNDED SO... SO...

I'M ALL RIGHT, SUSAN. THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONCERN...

BEN AND I HAVE BEEN... TALKING THINGS OVER.

WE HAVE... AGREED THAT A TIME HAS COME FOR A CHANGE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP. IT ONLY REMAINS TO BE DECIDED THE EXACT NATURE OF THE CHANGE.

A... CHANGE...?

IT'S SO HARD TO READ HER FACE, HER EYES. HOW MUCH WE DEPEND UPON THE SUBTLE SIGNALS OF THE FACE, SIGNALS A BLIND PERSON DOES NOT HAVE.

IT IS OBVIOUS THERE ARE NO MORE WORDS TO SPEAK.

SUSAN STORM RICHARDS FEELS A CHILL PASS THROUGH THE ROOM, REACHING OUT FROM SOME HIDDEN PLACE TO TOUCH HER, TO TOUCH THE UNBORN CHILD SHE CARRIES.

AS SHE WATCHES THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT MEN IN HER LIFE FLY OVER THE NEW YORK SKYLINE-- THE TORCH, HER BROTHER, ZOOMING UP TO JOIN THE HURTLING FANTASTICAR-- SHE KNOWS THAT A THRESHHOLD IS ABOUT TO BE CROSSED.

AND SHE KNOWS, TOO, THAT FROM THIS MOMENT FORWARD THINGS WILL NEVER BE QUITE THE SAME...

AND EVEN AS THAT THOUGHT CROSSES SUSAN'S MIND THE ***FANTASTICAR*** CROSSES THE SKYSCRAPING TOWERS OF MANHATTAN, DUE SOUTH OF CENTRAL PARK.

HOW ABOUT AN EXPLANATION, FEARLESS LEADER? I SAW THE EMERGENCY FLARE, BUT I DON'T SEE ANY SIGN OF ANYTHING I'D CALL AN EMERGENCY.

IF MY READINGS WERE CORRECT, JOHNNY, YOU SHOULD SEE SOMETHING ALL TOO SOON.

YEAH, HOTSHOT, TH' BIG BRAIN SAYS THE END OF THE WORLD'S ABOUT TA CRANK ITSELF UP, RIGHT IN TH' MIDDLE OF CENTRAL PARK.

HARDLY THE END OF THE WORLD, BEN. AT LEAST I HOPE NOTHING SO DRASTIC. BUT CLEARLY A FORCE, OR FORCES, UNLIKE ANY WE'VE EVER ENCOUNTERED.

BOY, REED, I'VE HEARD YOU DO YOUR DOOM AND GLOOM VOICE A WHOLE LOT OF TIMES, BUT THIS TIME YOU REALLY SOUND LIKE YOU MEAN IT.

I ALWAYS MEAN IT, LAD. IN A... "JOB" LIKE OURS WE CAN NEVER AFFORD TO OVERLOOK THE... WAIT A MINUTE.

THERE!

HOLY COW! IT LOOKS LIKE THE SETTING SUN... BUT THAT'S ***NORTH!***

LOOKS A HECKUVA LOT BRIGHTER THAN THAT TA ME, KID. WHAT'RE WE GETTIN' INTO THIS TIME, REED?

WHAT INDEED?

MINUTES AGO THIS HAD BEEN EMPTY, ROLLING GREEN LAWNS, THE SO-CALLED **SHEEP MEADOW**, NO LONGER POPULATED WITH SHEEP, BUT A POPULAR PICNIC AND PLAY SPOT FOR NEW YORKERS.

AND AS THE FANTASTICAR SETTLES TO THE GROUND THE THREE MEN CAN ONLY HOPE NONE OF THEIR FELLOW HUMANS WERE PRESENT WHEN **THIS** APPEARED.

REED... WHAT...?

SAVE YOUR QUESTIONS, JOHNNY. I HAVE NO ANSWER.

WELL, MARK THIS ONE ON YER CALENDER. THE BIG BRAIN STUCK FER WORDS.

THIS IS NOT TIME FOR YOUR PECULIAR BRAND OF MIRTH, BEN. MY INSTRUMENTS SHOW A PHENOMENAL AMOUNT OF RAW ENERGY RADIATING ABOUT THIS CONSTRUCT...

YET IT SEEMS UTTERLY **BENIGN**. IT IS HAVING NO EFFECT WHATSOEVER ON THE GRASS, THE TREES... OR **US**.

HEY... IS IT MY IMAGINATION OR DOES THIS THING SEEM *BIGGER* ON THE INSIDE THAN THE OUTSIDE?

YEAH... AND IT SEEMS... I DON'T KNOW QUITE HOW TO SAY IT...

NICER?

I GUESS THAT'S THE ONLY WORD. IT'S... *NICER* IN HERE.

THE AIR IS DEFINITELY CLEANER. AND THERE SEEMS TO BE SOME KIND OF... SOOTHING EFFECT. ALMOST LIKE A PSIONIC TRANQUILIZER.

YEAH, IT'S REAL NICE AND PEACEFUL AND SWEET AND CLEAN...

ALMOST LIKE SOME KIND OF... LURE...

YOU MEAN LIKE...

A TRAP!!

TO BE CONTINUED: IN **MARVEL SUPER HEROES: THE SECRET WAR #1,** *ON SALE NEXT MONTH. DON'T MISS* **THING #11** *FOR THE BEGINNINGS OF THE STRANGEST ADVENTURE OUR HERO HAS EVER HAD! WE MEAN IT, TRUE BELIEVERS!!*

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

Fantastic Four®

INTRODUCING THE *NEWEST* MEMBER OF THE *FANTASTIC FOUR!*

OH, MY! IS THE WORLD READY FOR THIS?

MAYBE NOT-- BUT *I* SURE AM!

Stan Lee PRESENTS:

THE HOUSE THAT REED BUILT

LOOK AT IT! DON'T IT SEEM ALL COZY AN' UNSUSPECTIN'...?

IT'S GONNA BE SO EASY TA DESTROY THEM.

JOHN BYRNE,
EVERYTHING EXCEPT...
LETTERING BY **MIKE HIGGINS** • COLORING BY **GLYNIS WEIN**
EDITING: **BOB BUDIANSKY**
BUILDING: **JIM SHOOTER**

SO FAR, SO GOOD. I DON'T HEAR NO ALARMS GOING OFF.

PROBABLY WOULDN'T FROM HERE. THEY GOT TH' PLACE REAL WELL SOUND-PROOFED.

WIND DIRECTION'S CHANGIN'. THIS IS GONNA BE THE TRICKY PART.

THEM TALL BUILDIN'S ALL 'ROUND MAKE FOR SOME **MEAN** UPDRAFTS.

GOTTA BRING MYSELF AROUND. GOTTA COME IN FROM THE **WEST.**

ACCORDIN' T'THE **WIZARD** THAT'S THEIR MOST **VULNERABLE** SIDE.

AT LEAST, THAT'S THE SIDE I CLIMBED THAT TIME I WUZ POSIN' AS **SPIDER-MAN.**

GOOD, ACCORDIN' T'THIS **SCANNER** I'VE BEEN **DETECTED...**

...BUT NOT IDENTIFIED AS AN **ATTACKER.**

YET...

OKAY, LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I **LAND...**

THREE SECONDS TO CONTACT...

DOWN!

NOW, GOTTA EIGHTY-SIX THESE **BALLOONS** BEFORE SOME PASSIN' SUPER-DO-GOODER SEES 'EM AN' COMES TO INVESTIGATE.

THERE, NOW...

WHASSAT?

BLAST, SOME KINDA SECURITY EYE-BALL, I BET. MUST BE **NEW.** WASN'T HERE LAST TIME.

WELL, IT AIN'T GONNA GET A LOOK AT ME. I'LL JUST...

HEY, ANOTHER ONE!

AN' ANOTHER! BUT MY **PASTE-GUN** CAN IMMOBILIZE AN' CLOG 'EM ALL.

OKAY, SO BEFORE WE GET ANY **MORE** SURPRISES I GOTTA GET OFF TH' ROOF AN' DOWN INTA TH' **BAXTER BUILDING.**

LET'S JUST SEE IF THIS OL' MULTI-PHASE ELECTRONIC SKELETON KEY STILL WORKS.

FWEEEEP

BINGO!

SHUNK!

STILL NO SOUND OF ALARMS.

EVERYTHIN'S GOIN' ACCORDIN' TA PLAN. AS LONG AS I FOLLOW TH' **FANTASTIC FOUR'S** OWN PROCEEDURES...

... TH' BUILDIN'S DEFENSE SYSTEMS'LL BE TOO CONFUSED TA ATTACK ME.

NOW, LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT...

THE HANGAR DECK.

YEAH, WHAT A TREASURE TROVE **THIS** IS.

ALL TH' FF'S FLYIN' STUFF IS ON THIS LEVEL. TH' POGO PLANE, ALL TH' FANTASTICARS...

...EVEN TH' ACCESS TA THEIR SPACE ROCKET, ALL RIPE FER TH' PICKIN'.

@@INTRUDER@@

@@HANGAR DECK@@

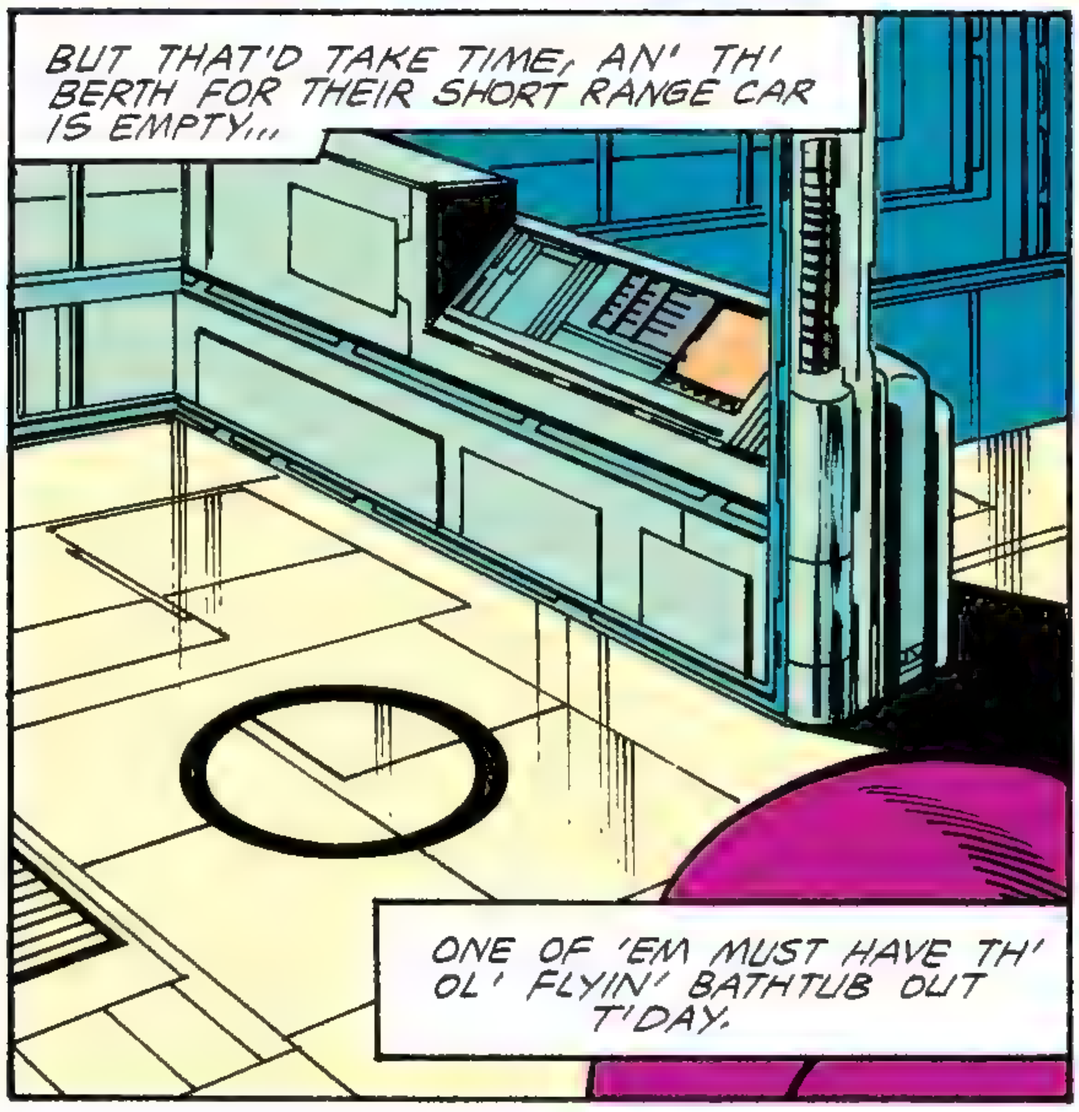
@@STAND BY FOR RETINA SCAN@@

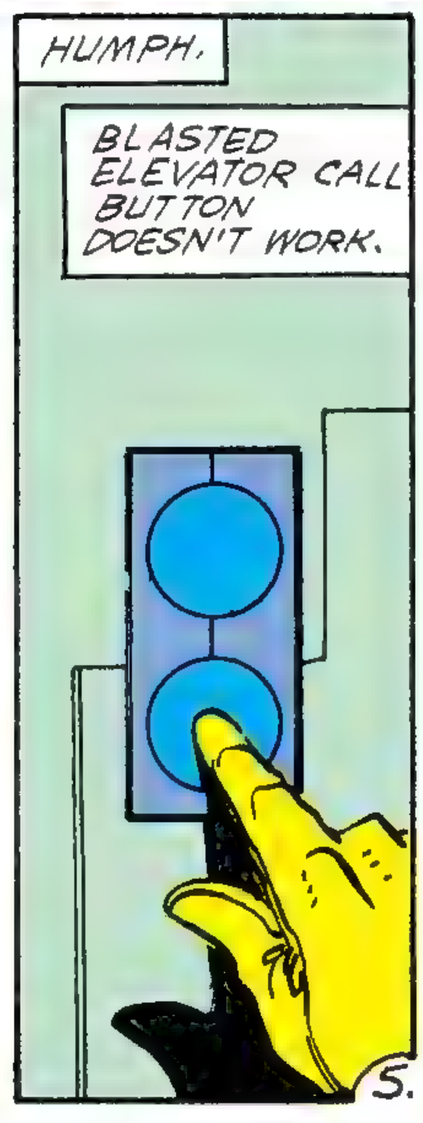
@@IDENTITY CONFIRMED@@ PETER PETRUSKY [] PASTE-POT PETE [] THE TRAPSTER

@@AFFILIATION@@ THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR [] THE WINGLESS WIZARD [] THE SANDMAN [] ELECTRO [] MEDUSA [] THUNDRA [] LLYRA

@@BELIEVED PRESENTLY INDEPENDENT@@ @@SEE CROSS-REFERANCE #2376-123@@

@@INTRUDER HAS ENTERED HANGAR DECK @ MAINTAIN SCANNING MODE@@
THERE'S NOTHIN' TA STOP ME FROM RIGGIN' THIS FANTASTICAR TA **BLOW UP** TH' NEXT TIME TH'FF USE IT...





ØØRECORDED: ATTEMPTED IMPROPER USE OF SOL-ENOID ELEVATOR LOCKØØ

ØØSCAN CONTINUINGØØ

ØØSUBJECT ATTEMPTING HANGAR DECK EXITØØ

WAIT A MINUTE. MAYBE THESE ELEVATORS ARE EQUIPPED WITH TH' SAME BEAM-LOCKS AS TH' LOBBY DOORS.

BUT THAT LOOKS LIKE A REG'LAR ELECTRONIC LOCK ON THAT DOOR...

I WUZ RIGHT.

GREAT! A STAIR-WELL. I FIGGERED THERE'D BE SOME OTHER WAY BE-TWEEN FLOORS IN CASE TH' POWER FAILED.

NOW, IF I REMEMBER RIGHT, THE NEXT LEVEL DOWN SHOULD BE TH' ASTRO-SCIENCE...

WHO'S THAT?!?

AW.., CRUD! THIS PLACE IS STARTIN' TA **SPOOK** ME.

I'LL BE JUMPIN' AT MY OWN **SHADOW** NEXT.

ØØSUBJECT TRACKING CONTINUING ØØØØ

ØØALL SECURITY AREAS UNDER MAXIMUM PHASE LOCK MONITORINGØØ

ØØALL SYSTEMS STAND BY FROM GA-873 THRU AN-854 LEVELSØØ

ØØBIO-SCAN TO MAXIMUM TRACING ØØØ ALL BIO-FUNCTIONS INDICATE EXTREME NERVOUS DISTRESSØØ

ØØWEAPON SCAN COMPLETED INITIATE JAMMING SEQUENCEØØ

DOWN WE GO ANOTHER LEVEL.

THIS SHOULD BE THEIR PHYSICS LAB AN' LIKE THAT.

AN' TH' SCANNER SHOWS A BIG ENERGY SOURCE OVER TA TH' RIGHT SOMEWHERES.

THAT LOOKS PROMISIN'. THE DOOR IS HEAVILY SHIELDED.

A REG'LAR ENERGY SENSOR PROBABLY WOULDN'T HAVE DETECTED ANYTHING THROUGH ALL THAT METAL.

LUCKY THIS SCANNER WUZ MADE BY TH' WIZARD, HE'S ALMOST AS BRAINY AS **MISTER FANTASTIC.**

HMM. THAT'S ONE MOTHER OF A LOCK. THEY SURE DON'T WANT ANYONE...

YEOW!

BLAST! SOME KINDA ELECTRO-SHOCK DEFENSE SYSTEM. TH' SCANNER DIDN'T PICK IT UP.

BUT I CAN FIX IT REAL QUICK WITH MY PASTE-GUN...

JUST A QUICK ZAP OF TH' LIQUID EMULSION WITHOUT TH' ADHESIVE AN TH' LOCK SHOULD SHORT...

WHAT TH'...?

THE GUN'S JAMMED!

ØØCONFIRMATION OF WEAPON DEACT-IVATION ▯▯▯ SCAN CONTINUINGØØ

ØØSUBJECT PROCEEDING TO STAIRSØØ

ØØSWITCHING TO LATERAL SCANØØ

ØØLATERAL SCAN ACTIVATED SUBJECT LOCATEDØØ

ØØSUBJECT APPROACHING RESIDENTIAL LEVEL ▯▯

ØØDEFENSE ALERT TO ALL FIRST LEVEL SYSTEMSØØ

ØØDEFEN-MODE KL8-0037 SCAN FOR SUBJECT'S PRIME VULNERABILITIES AND COMMENCE CAPTURE SEQUENCEØØ

WHERE TH' HECK IS EVERYBODY?

THE WHOLE BLASTED TOWER COMPLEX IS **DESERTED!**

IT AIN'T **FAIR!** I CAME TA PROVE I'M NOT TH' **LOSER** EVERY-ONE THINKS I AM...

...TA PROVE I COULD BEAT TH' **FF** WITHOUT TH' REST OF TH' **FRIGHTFUL FOUR.**

MEEP!

EXCUSE ME, SIR, BUT YOU ARE NOT AUTHORIZED TO BE IN THIS PART OF THE BUILDING.

HOLY!

A FLYIN' ROBOT!

I KNEW IT WAS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE!

TH' SECURITY SYSTEM MUSTA BIN TRACKIN' ME ALL ALONG.

H.U.B.E.R.T. TO CENTRAL...

SUBJECT IS FLEEING. SHALL I DETAIN HIM?

@@NEGATIVE@@

@@SUBJECT IS ABOUT || || TO DETAIN HIMSELF@@

THAT--THAT ELEVATOR, IT'S GOT A REG'LAR **CALL-BUTTON.**

OF COURSE! THIS IS THE VISITOR RECEPTION LEVEL.

THE ELEVATOR WOULD BE DE-SIGNED TO LET ANYONE IN AND OUT ONCE THEY'D BEEN PASSED THIS FAR BY SECURITY.

C'MON! C'MON!

OPEN UP YA BLASTED!!!

@@SUBJECT LEAVING MAX-SECUR-AREA@@

@@TOWER SYSTEMS STEP DOWN TO YELLOW ALERT@@@@

OH... HOW DID **YOU** GET INTO THE TOWER?

A RECEPTIONIST-!

I CAN USE HER AS A **HOSTAGE** IN CASE THERE ARE ANY MORE TRICKS AHEAD.

OKAY, BABE. NO TROUBLE. YOU'RE COMIN' WITH ME.

OH, NO, SIR. I'M AFRAID THAT WOULD BE QUITE...

IMPOSSIBLE.

UNGH!!

POLICE?

SERGEANT QUINLAN, PLEASE.

N-NO... NO... IT AIN'T POSSIBLE.

I'M TH' TRAPSTER!

I CAN'T GET BEAT BY AN EMPTY BUILDING...

AN' A... A...

G... IRL...

ØØHELLO, SERGEANT, THIS IS ROBERTA AT THE BAXTER BUILDING.

I'M SORRY TO DISTURB YOU DURING LUNCH, BUT WE HAVE A PICK-UP FOR YOU. YES, THE TRAP-STER. OH, NO, HE IS QUITE SUBDUED.

WE WERE ABLE TO DEAL WITH HIM EASILY!

HOME ARE THE HEROES

MRS. RICHARDS! PLEASE!!

AVENGERS MANSION, EAST OF CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK. A LONG AND EMOTIONALLY DRAINING WEEK IS DRAWING TO A CLOSE...

OH-- HELLO, **JARVIS,** SORRY TO INVADE YOUR SANCTUM SANCTORUM, BUT I CAUGHT A WHIFF OF THESE YUMMY COOKING AROMAS...

...AND, WELL, I'M AFRAID MY CURIOSITY JUST GOT THE BETTER OF ME.

I APPRECIATE THE COMPLIMENT IMPLIED, MRS. RICHARDS...

...BUT THIS PARTICULAR DISH IS TERRIBLY FINICKY, AND TEMPERATURES MUST BE PRECISELY MAINTAINED.

THERE! I THINK THAT SHOULD COMPENSATE FOR THE HEAT LOSS.

I'LL... ER... JUST LEAVE IT TO YOU, THEN, SHALL I, JARVIS?

SORRY AGAIN.

OH, THAT'S ALL RIGHT, MA'AM.

I EXPECT WE'VE ALL BEEN... A LITTLE TENSE THE LAST FEW DAYS.

PLEASE DON'T GIVE IT ANOTHER THOUGHT.

"A LITTLE TENSE". JARVIS HAS A WONDERFULLY ***BRITISH*** TURN FOR UNDER-STATEMENT.

WHO ***WOULDN'T*** BE TENSE AFTER WHAT'S HAP-PENED?

"I'VE FELT SO HELP-LESS SINCE I WATCHED ***REED, BEN*** AND ***JOHNNY*** FLY OFF TOWARDS CENTRAL PARK.

"REED'S EQUIP-MENT HAD MONITORED A STRANGE FLUCTUATION OF ENERGY...

"THEY'D BARELY HAD TIME TO REACH THE SOURCE OF THAT DISTURBANCE WHEN...

THAT LIGHT!!!

S-SUSAN... THAT LIGHT... WHAT...?

ALICIA... YOU SAW IT, TOO? BUT YOU'RE... BLIND!!

BUT I SAW IT, SUSAN. SOMEHOW, IT SEEMED TO FILL THE WORLD, THE UNIVERSE!

A TERRIBLE, CONSUMING LIGHT-- LIKE SOMETHING ALIVE... SOMETHING... HUNGRY!

INCREDIBLE. IF SHE WAS SOMEHOW ABLE TO "SEE" THAT LIGHT IT MUST HAVE BEEN RADIATING ON UNIMAGINABLE WAVELENGTHS.

ALICIA, FRANKLIN IS ASLEEP IN JOHNNY'S OLD ROOM. WOULD YOU...?

SUSAN, NO! DON'T LEAVE US HERE ALONE...

...NOT AGAIN!

BLAST! I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED SHE'D BE TERRIFIED OF STAYING HERE BY HERSELF. THE LAST TIME SHE WAS NEARLY KILLED BY ANNIHILUS.*

ALL RIGHT, ALICIA. GIVE ME YOUR HAND.

*SEE ISSUE #'s 251-256.--Bob.

WHAT A STRANGE TRIO WE MUST HAVE MADE, ZOOMING AWAY FROM THE BAXTER BUILDING IN ANOTHER OF OUR FANTASTICARS.

AN EXPECTANT MOTHER, A BLIND WOMAN AND A RUDELY AWAKENED FIVE-YEAR-OLD BOY.

THERE'S THE SHEEP MEADOW AHEAD... AND THERE'S SOME RESIDUAL RADIANCE.

THAT MUST BE WHERE THE LIGHT CAME FROM.

"BUT IT WAS MORE-- MUCH, MUCH MORE THAN A SIMPLE SOURCE OF LIGHT THAT WE DISCOVERED AS I GUIDED THE FANTASTICAR HIGH OVER THE ROLLING GREEN LAWNS OF THE SHEEP MEADOW.

SUSAN... WHAT IS IT? I SENSE...

IT-- IT'S **AWESOME**, ALICIA! SOME MANNER OF CONSTRUCT. IT LOOKS ALIEN... AND MUST HAVE JUST **MATERIALIZED** HERE!

"SOMETHING ABOUT THE STRANGE EDIFICE SEEMED TO TUG AT MY MIND, COMPELLING ME TO LAND, TO WALK THROUGH ONE OF THE ENORMOUS PORTALS...

"...BUT EXPERIENCE HAD TAUGHT ME BETTER THAN THAT...

I'M SCANNING. IT'S RADIATING ON EVERY WAVELENGTH.

YET IT APPEARS **BENIGN**...

HARMLESS.

"THEN, BEFORE I COULD DO ANY MORE TO ANSWER THAT SIREN CALL...

SUE!

IT'S VANISHING!

"I QUICKLY BROUGHT THE FANTASTICAR DOWN A FEW YARDS FROM WHERE THE OUTER PERIMETER OF THE OBJECT HAD BEEN, AND JUST AS QUICKLY DISCOVERED I WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO HAD COME TO INVESTIGATE...

MOCKINGBIRD, PLEASE! TRY TO KEEP CALM. THE **VISION** WILL TELL US WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OTHERS AS SOON AS HE'S DONE SCANNING.

KEEP CALM? THAT'S ALL RIGHT FOR YOU TO SAY, **WANDA.** YOUR **HUSBAND** DIDN'T JUST **VANISH** INTO THIN AIR.

WANDA... VISION... **STARFOX!** ARE THE **AVENGERS** INVOLVED IN THIS, TOO?

SUE? BUT WHERE ARE THE REST OF THE **FANTASTIC FOUR?**

OH-- I PRAY THEY HAVE NOT ALSO BEEN... **TAKEN?**

THE INVISIBLE GIRL!

TAKEN...? WANDA... WHAT ON EARTH DO YOU MEAN?

I SUSPECT **NOTHING** "ON EARTH", SUSAN. I CAN AT THIS POINT ONLY HAZARD A GUESS, BUT I BELIEVE THAT ARTIFACT WAS SOME KIND OF TRANSPORTING DEVICE.

T-TRANSPORTED. YOU MEAN... REED, BEN, JOHNNY... THEY'VE BEEN...

BUT WHERE IT MIGHT HAVE TRANSPORTED THE REST OF THE AVENGERS I CANNOT SAY.

AS MY **WIFE** PUT IT... **TAKEN.** IF **MISTER FANTASTIC, THE THING,** AND **THE HUMAN TORCH** INDEED ENTERED THAT OBJECT... THEY ARE NO LONGER ON **EARTH.**

AND THAT'S WHERE IT'S BEEN FOR A WEEK OR SO NOW, WE'VE ALL BEEN ON **HOLD**, WAITING FOR SOMETHING, **ANYTHING** TO HAPPEN.

AND WE'VE ALL BEEN DEALING WITH OUR NERVOUS TENSION AS BEST WE CAN. MOCKINGBIRD HAS BEEN TAKING LONGER AND LONGER WALKS. ALICIA, FRANKLIN AND I HAVE STAYED AT THE MANSION TO BE CLOSER TO THE SHEEP MEADOW...

...AND JARVIS HAS BEEN PREPARING MORE ELABORATE MEALS.

SUSAN? ARE YOU READY TO TAKE OUR STROLL?

YEAH, C'MON, MOMMY. YOU PROMISED TO TAKE ME TO RUMPY-MYERS TODAY.

AND A PROMISE MADE IS A DEBT UNPAID, RIGHT, KIDDO? LET'S GO **PIG OUT!**

FRANKLIN IS SUCH A COMFORT, OF COURSE, I HAVEN'T TOLD HIM HIS FATHER IS **MISSING**, BUT HIS YOUTHFUL ENTHUSIASM IS LIKE A BREATH OF FRESH AIR.

ALICIA, YOU SEEM... WITHDRAWN TODAY. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, DEAR?

I'M FINE, THANK YOU, SUSAN. I JUST HAVE A FUNNY SENSATION IN THE BACK OF MY MIND...

AS IF SOMETHING ABSOLUTELY MOMENTOUS IS GOING TO HAPPEN TODAY.

THAT SOUNDS **OMINOUS**. I WONDER... OH, MOCKINGBIRD. HOW ARE THINGS GOING WITH YOU?

AS WELL AS CAN BE EXPECTED, SUE. I'VE ONLY BEEN A BRIDE FOR **FIVE MINUTES**. SEEMS A BIT TOO SOON TO BE CONTEMPLATING WIDOWHOOD.

THE VISION KEEPS TELLING ME NOT TO WORRY, THAT MY HUSBAND, **HAWKEYE**, AND THE REST OF THE **AVENGERS** HAVE SURVIVED MANY BIZARRE THINGS IN THEIR YEARS TOGETHER.

BUT THAT DOESN'T GET ME PAST THE FACT THAT THIS TIME COULD BE THE LAST. THAT THEY COULD ALL BE...

BEST NOT TO THINK SUCH THINGS, MOCKINGBIRD. IN THE YEARS OF MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ***THING*** I HAVE LEARNED THE LIFE OF A SUPER HERO IS THAT OF A SOLDIER IN AN UNENDING WAR, AND WE MUST STEEL OURSELVES, AS THOSE LEFT ON THE HOMEFRONT.

BUT I'M A "SUPER HERO" MYSELF, ALICIA. I CAN'T JUST...

OH... TO ***HECK*** WITH IT. HAS THE VISION MADE HIS SPEECH TO THE PRESS YET?

JUST STARTING, I THINK. BUT, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE US NOW, MOCKINGBIRD, WE HAVE A SMALL BOY IN NEED OF AN ICE CREAM FIX. AM I RIGHT, SPORT?

YEAH!

THUS, ONE HOUR AND SEVERAL THOUSAND CALORIES LATER, AS NIGHT FALLS...

THE LEAVES ARE TURNING IN CENTRAL PARK, DRAWING THEIR BRIGHT ORANGE CURTAIN OVER THE LAST ACT OF A SPECTACULARLY BEAUTIFUL FALL.

SUDDENLY...

THE LIGHT AGAIN!

BUT... IS IT THE SAME? ALICIA DOESN'T SEEM TO NOTICE IT THIS TIME.

ARE THEY... DO I DARE ***HOPE***... ARE THEY ***BACK?***

ALICIA, WATCH FRANKLIN, PLEASE. I HAVE TO CHECK ON SOMETHING.

SUE?

SHE RACES HEADLONG INTO THE MOTTLED WORLD BENEATH THE TREES, SUDDENLY HEEDLESS OF HER ADVANCED MATERNITY.

AND AS SHE RUNS HER CELLS WARP THE LIGHT AROUND THEM UNTIL...

I HAVEN'T USED MY POWER OF ***INVISIBILITY*** IN OVER A MONTH, BUT SOMETHING TELLS ME I'LL NEED IT NOW.

THEN, AS SUSAN REACHES THE EDGE OF THE SHEEP MEADOW...

IRON MAN!

THE FAMILIAR METALLIC FIGURE FLASHES ACROSS THE SKY ALMOST TOO QUICKLY TO BE SEEN.

THEN... THEN THE REST OF THE AVENGERS *MUST* HAVE RETURNED AS WELL...

YES!

THERE THEY ARE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MEADOW, AND ISN'T THAT *SPIDER-MAN* NEARBY? AND THE *HULK*?

AND IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN, SURELY THAT'S THE *X-MEN* OVER THERE?

BUT... BUT WHERE ARE REED, AND BEN AND JOHNNY? IF THEY WERE TAKEN AT THE SAME TIME...

SURELY THEY MUST *RETURN* AT THE SAME TIME...?

AGONIZING MOMENTS CLICK BY. IT MIGHT ONLY BE SECONDS, BUT TO SUSAN RICHARDS IT SEEMS CENTURIES.

THEN...

WAIT... ANOTHER NIMBUS OF LIGHT. NEAR THE CENTER OF THE MEADOW?

CAN IT BE?

"IT IS! IT IS!"

"I'D KNOW REED FROM HIS POSTURE ALONE, AND THAT HAS TO BE JOHNNY TO THE LEFT..."

"...BUT *WHO* IS THAT WITH THEM?"

WA-HOO! WE MADE IT! WE'RE BACK ON **EARTH!***

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D EVER BE SO **GLAD** TO BREATHE NEW YORK AIR AGAIN!

OH MY GOOD-NESS! IT CAN'T BE! BUT IT *IS!* **SHE-HULK!** AND SHE'S WEAR-ING A MODIFIED **FF** UNIFORM.

WHAT IN THE WORLD...?!?

*IF YOU WANT TO SEE WHERE THEY'VE BEEN, CHECK OUT **MARVEL SUPER HEROES: THE SECRET WARS** TWELVE-ISSUE MAXI-SERIES, **#1** ON SALE NEXT MONTH! -- Bob

REALLY NOW, PEOPLE.

I TOLD YOU I'D GET US ALL BACK. SURELY YOU DIDN'T DOUBT ME?

REED!

SUE, DARLING! YOU'RE ALL RIGHT! AND YOU HAVEN'T HAD THE BABY YET. WE MUST NOT HAVE BEEN GONE AS LONG AS IT SEEMED.

OH, REED! JUST THIS ONCE SAVE THE INSTANT ANALYSIS...

AND JUST, *KISS* ME!

JUST THEN...

DADDY! UNCA JOHNNY! MOMMY DIDN'T TELL ME YOU WERE GOING TO BE HERE!

FRANKLIN!

GREAT TA SEE YA, JUNIOR. FOR A WHILE THERE IT LOOKED LIKE WE WOULDN'T GET BACK BEFORE YOUR COLLEGE GRADUATION!

WHO'S THE BIG GREEN LADY, UNCA JOHNNY? SHE'S SO *PRETTY!*

J-JOHNNY? IS BEN HERE? I DON'T...

OH--ALICIA-- I-I'D GIVE ANYTHING NOT TO HAVE TO TELL YOU THIS, BUT BEN... WELL, HE... HE ISN'T...

BUT BEFORE A STAM-MERING **JOHNNY STORM** *CAN FIND THE RIGHT WORDS...*

SUE!

ARRGH!

TH-THAT WAS *HARD RADIATION!* A SUDDEN, ALMOST EXPLOSIVE BURST.

SUE, DARLING, CAN YOU SPEAK? ARE YOU... ARE YOU...?

R-REED...

REED... IT WAS THE *BABY!*

I FELT IT! I FELT IT MOVE... FELT IT LASH OUT!

H-HELP... ME...

GOT TO GET HER TO A HOSPITAL IMMEDIATELY... EVEN THOUGH I RISK ANOTHER RADIATION BURST...

DON'T BE A FOOL, REED, MY TOLERANCE TO RADIOACTIVITY IS FAR ***GREATER*** THAN YOURS...

...AND NO ONE'S GOING TO WASTE MY TIME ASKING FOR FORMS TO BE FILLED OUT. I'LL GET SUE TO A HOSPITAL...

JOHNNY, FLY AHEAD TO ***MERCY GENERAL.*** LET 'EM KNOW WE'RE COMING.

ON MY WAY, SHE-HULK!

BUT THAT FLASH OF RADIATION... I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT.

THIS IS ***NOTHING*** LIKE THE PROBLEM SUE HAD DELIVERING FRANKLIN!

THIS MAY BE SOMETHING EVEN ***REED*** CAN'T DEAL WITH!

*DO WE HAVE TO SAY IT? **TO BE CONTINUED!!***

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

Fantastic Four®

KARISMA COMMANDS...

...DEATH TO THE INVISIBLE GIRL!

SOMEHOW THIS ISN'T QUITE WHAT I'D EXPECTED FROM MY FIRST DAY AS AN *OFFICIAL* MEMBER OF THE ***FANTASTIC FOUR***...
HER REAL NAME IS ***JENNIFER WALTERS,*** *THOUGH THE WORLD AT LARGE HAS LATELY COME TO KNOW HER BY ANOTHER NAME...*
SHE-HULK?

OH... MISS *MASTERS*, HOW ARE YOU?

I AM WELL, THANK YOU. AND PLEASE, CALL ME *ALICIA*. HOW IS *SUSAN* DOING?

SHE'S RESTING RIGHT NOW. OR, SLEEPING AT LEAST. I FEEL SO... SO HELPLESS. ALL MY ENORMOUS STRENGTH IS JUST... *USELESS*.

DON'T DISTRESS YOURSELF. SHE IS IN GOOD HANDS.

*HER HUSBAND, **REED RICHARDS**, IS ONE OF THE MOST BRILLIANT MINDS ON EARTH, AND HE HAS CALLED IN THE TOP EXPERTS IN THE FIELD OF RADIATION...*

***WALTER LANGKOWSKI**, THE CANADIAN GAMMA RESEARCHER...*

***BRUCE BANNER**, OUR OWN LEADING EXPERT ON THE EFFECTS OF RADIATION...*

***EVEN MICHAEL MORBIUS**, PERHAPS THE WORLD'S GREATEST EXPERT ON BLOOD RADIOLOGY.*

AND EVEN NOW THE *HUMAN TORCH*, SUSAN'S BROTHER, IS CONTACTING OTHER EXPERTS.

YET, THIS IS SO MUCH LIKE THE DIFFICULTIES SHE HAD WITH HER *FIRST* PREGNANCY, AND THIS TIME REED CANNOT OBTAIN THE *COSMIC CONTROL ROD* OF *ANNIHILUS*, FOR ANNIHILUS HAS BEEN DESTROYED!

BUT... HOW ABOUT *YOU*, ALICIA? THIS MUST BE DOUBLY ROUGH FOR YOU, WHAT WITH THE *THING* HAVING CHOSEN NOT TO RETURN TO EARTH...*

*LAST ISSUE--**BOB**.

NO, SHE-HULK, THAT IS, STRANGELY ENOUGH, NOT SO TERRIBLE A BURDEN AS YOU MIGHT THINK. I ONLY LONG FOR THE HAPPINESS OF MY BELOVED *BEN*, AND IF HE THINKS HE CAN FIND IT ON AN ALIEN WORLD...

WHAT IS STRANGE IS THE WAY MY MIND KEEPS CONNECTING BEN AND SUE, GOING BACK TO SOMETHING THAT HAPPENENED A FEW MONTHS AGO.

SOMETHING SO SILLY AND INSIGNIFICANT COMPARED TO THE MANY GREAT DANGERS THEY HAVE FACED TOGETHER...

Stan Lee PRESENTS:

CALL HER... KARISMA!

ALICIA'S SMALL, SOFT VOICE TRAILS ALMOST TO A WHISPER, AND SHE-HULK FANCIES SHE SEES A SUBTLE CHANGE IN THOSE SIGHTLESS BLUE EYES.

SHE IS **REMEMBERING**... REMEMBERING A DAY, NOT SO VERY LONG AGO, AND YET, PERHAPS AN ETERNITY PAST...

A SUMMER DAY. A DAY FOR LOVE, AND LIFE, AND WALKS IN PLACES GREEN AND GROWING.

YA KNOW, BABY, IT AMAZES ME EVERY TIME I THINK ABOUT IT. I MEAN, HERE YOU ARE, BLIND SINCE YOU WUZ JUST A LITTLE KID, AN' YET YA SEEM TA GET MORE OUTTA THIS PARK THAN ALL THE PEOPLE WITH EYES THAT WORK.

ICE CREAM 50¢

JOHN BYRNE
STORY AND INKS
KERRY GAMMIL
GUEST PENCILER
(PGS. 3 THRU 21)
DIANA ALBERS
LETTERER
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COLORIST
BOB BUDIANSKY
EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER
EDITOR IN CHIEF

IT'S SIMPLY THAT I'VE LEARNED TO APPRECIATE THE WORLD FOR THINGS OTHER THAN COLOR AND LIGHT, BEN DARLING. THE SOUND OF BIRDS SINGING. THE TOUCH OF A BREEZE ON MY CHEEK. THE SCENT OF FLOWERS BLOOMING.

EVEN THE ROUGH HAND OF A GENTLE SOUL-- THE HAND OF SOME-ONE I LOVE.

LOOK AWAY A MOMENT NOW. THE WORDS THAT FOLLOW ARE FOR THE EARS OF THE LOVERS ALONE.

AND HERE, NOT TOO FAR AWAY, ON CENTRAL PARK WEST, NEAR EIGHTY-FIFTH STREET...

MAN, I HATE THIS JOB. HAULIN' AROUND ALL THE MONEY IN THE WORLD, AN' GETTIN' PAID FIVE CENTS FER MY TROUBLES.

AH, GIMME A BREAK, LANCE. IF YOU REALLY HATED THIS JOB AS MUCH AS YOU SAY, YOU'D HAVE QUIT...

HEY...LOOK OUT!!

BREAKS SQUEAL, AND EVEN THE BLASÉ NEW YORKERS GLANCE IN THE DIRECTION OF THE SOUND.

BUT THE STRANGE WOMAN IN BLACK DOES NOT EVEN FLINCH.

IN FACT, IT IS THE PASSEN-GERS OF THE ARMORED CAR WHO FLINCH, AND SUDDENLY TURN GLASSY-EYED AS THE WOMAN RAISES, THEN QUICKLY LOWERS HER VEIL.

OKAY, BOYS. DO YOUR STUFF.

AND, NOT FAR AWAY, THIS LITTLE TABLEAU HAS SOME UNEXPECTED WITNESSES.

HEY, WHAT'S GOIN' ON?

BEN?

LOOKS LIKE A ROBBERY GOIN' DOWN, HONEY.

"BUT SOME FUNNY KINDA ROBBERY. THEM GUARDS AIN'T DOIN' NOTHIN'."

"THEY'RE JUST SITTIN' THERE WITH DOPEY GRINS ON THEIR FACES!"

WELL, YERS TRULY CAN DO A LITTLE MORE THAN *THAT!*

BE CAREFUL, DARLING. I SENSE...

SOMETHING STRANGE...

AND A FEW YARDS AWAY...

HOT DOG! THIS IS THE EASIEST PICKIN'S WE *EVER* HAD!

THINGS AIN'T NEVER LOOKED BETTER.

WELL, THANKS FER THE COMPLIMENT, PAL, OR WAS THAT JUST A POOR CHOICE OF WORDS?

=GULP=

HEY... REAL SHARP. CAN I QUOTE YA ON THAT?

NO, BUT YOU CAN PUT MY MEN DOWN NOW, MR. GRIMM.

WHO IN THE...

MY REAL NAME IS NO LONGER IMPORTANT. YOU MAY CALL ME...

KARISMA.

HAMANAH-HAMANAH...

UM... ER... WHAT WAS IT YOU SAID? PUT YOUR MEN DOWN?

SURE! SURE! ANYTHING YOU SAY!

THERE IS SUDDENLY A STRANGE AND ALIEN QUALITY IN THE VOICE OF THE THING--A CLOYING, ALMOST WHIMPERING SOUND--

*--THE SOUND OF SOMEONE **DESPERATE** TO PLEASE.*

THAT'S A **GOOD** BOY. NOW, PICK UP THOSE SACKS OF MONEY FOR ME, WOULD YOU? THERE'S A DEAR.

HOLY COW! HE'S DOIN' IT! HE'S DOIN' WHAT SHE TOLD HIM!

WHAT? BEN? DARLING! WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU?

BOOST

BUT THE THING SEEMS NOT TO HEAR, NOT TO CARE, AS THE BEAUTIFUL BLIND GIRL RACES ALMOST UNERRINGLY TO HIS SIDE.

BEN... I HEARD THAT WOMAN... WHAT DID SHE DO TO YOU?

BEN!!

IS THERE, FOR JUST THE BRIEFEST INSTANT, A FLICKER SOMEWHERE IN HIS DEEP, BLUE EYES? A MOMENT OF RECOGNITION, OF REACHING OUT...

*ALMOST, PERHAPS, A CRY FOR **HELP**?*

WE SHALL NEVER KNOW...

GRIMM! STOP THAT LOLLY-GAGGING, YOU WICKED BOY! COME ALONG NOW!

YES'M. DON'T BE ANGRY. *PLEASE* DON'T?

LOOK... I GOT THE MONEY FOR YA...

BEN!

OH, MY POOR BEN! WHAT HAS SHE DONE TO YOU?

WHAT HAS SHE DONE?!

AND NOT TERRIBLY FAR AWAY, IN A FASHIONABLE BOUTIQUE JUST OFF BROADWAY...

MY DEAR, IT IS JUST ABSOLUTELY *YOU!*

HMM... WELL, I'VE WORN THIS STYLE BEFORE, BUT I'M NOT SURE THE WORLD--OR MY HUSBAND--IS QUITE READY FOR ME AS A REDHEAD.

KEEP 'EM GUESSING, THAT'S WHAT I ALWAYS SAY. WHY JUST THE OTHER DAY I...

OH MY WORD!

WHAT'S THAT? SIRENS?

SIRENS INDEED, FOR IT SEEMS AS IF HALF THE SQUAD CARS IN MANHATTAN ARE SUDDENLY CONVERGING ON A SPOT NEARBY...

WHAT CAN BE GOING ON? I HOPE IT ISN'T SOMETHING TERRIBLE!

WELL, IT'S NOT LIKELY TO BE TOO TRIVIAL WITH THAT MANY CARS.

LOOKS TO ME LIKE SOMETHING I SHOULD CHECK OUT... BUT NOT AS *SUSAN RICHARDS...*

...AS THE *INVISIBLE GIRL!!*

UNSEEN ENERGIES FLOW ABOUT HER, AND A COLUMN OF PURE FORCE THICKENS THE AIR BENEATH HER FEET...

AND WITHIN SECONDS THIS UNIQUE MODE OF TRANSPORTATION HAS CARRIED HER NEAR THE HEART OF THE FRAY...

OKAY, GROUP SIX, BRING UP BEHIND. WATCH OUT NOW. HE'S *MEAN!*

THEY'RE BATTLING SOMEONE... FROM THE AMOUNT OF DAMAGE HERE ALREADY, SOMEONE ENORMOUSLY POWERFUL. WHO--?

OH NO! IT CAN'T BE!

"IT CAN'T!"

HER? WHO IS HE TALKING ABOUT? I DON'T SEE ALICIA ANYWHERE NEAR.

I'VE GOT TO FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON HERE.

OFFICER! OFFICER CAN YOU TELL ME...

HOLY CATS! ANOTHER ONE!

K-KEEP AWAY FROM ME! KEEP AWAY, YA HEAR? DON'T HURT ME!

HURT YOU?

HE'S ALMOST HYSTERICAL!

GOT TO DO SOMETHING TO CALM HIM, SHOW I MEAN HIM NO HARM.

DON'T BE SILLY, OFFICER. IF I WERE GOING TO HURT YOU I WOULDN'T APPROACH IN THE OPEN. I'D DO *THIS.*

ONE WAY!

KEEP AWAY FROM ME, YA CREEPS! YOU HURT *HER* AN' I'LL BUST YA ALL INTA TH' NEXT *CENTURY!*

WH-WHERE...?

I'M RIGHT HERE, OFFICER. NOW, WILL YOU STOP PANICKING AND TELL ME WHAT HAS HAPPENED HERE? WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE *THING?*

Y-YOU TELL ME, LADY. I ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU GUYS WERE ON *OUR* SIDE...

BUT SEEMS LIKE THE THING'S DECIDED TO CHANGE LOYALTIES... AT LEAST SINCE HE GOT MIXED UP IN THAT BANK HEIST...

BANK HEIST?

THIS MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL. CALL THE REST OF YOUR PEOPLE, OFFICER. TELL THEM TO HOLD THEIR FIRE. I'LL TRY TO REASON WITH BEN.

BEN! BEN, STOP IT! STOP IT THIS INSTANT!

KEEP AWAY FROM ME, SUZIE. I DON'T WANNA HAFTA HURT YA.

THEY'RE AFTER *HER*, DON'TCHA SEE? AN' I CAN'T LET THEM GET *HER*. I JUST CAN'T.

BEN, NOW CALM DOWN AND BE REASONABLE! WHO IS THIS "*HER*" YOU KEEP TALKING ABOUT?

HUH? ONE A' YER INVISIBLE FORCE FIELDS!

YOU... YOU'RE ON THEIR SIDE! YA WANNA GET *HER!* WANNA HURT *HER!!*

BUT I WON'T LET YA! I WON'T!

HIS JACKHAMMER FISTS PUMMEL THE INSIDE OF THE UNSEEN BUBBLE, SENDING REVERBERATIONS BACK THROUGH THE FIELD, POUNDING AGAINST THE VERY FIBER OF SUSAN RICHARD'S BEING.

BUT THE FIELD HOLDS.

BLAST IT! I CAN'T WASTE TIME WEARIN' YA DOWN. EVERY SECOND I'M AWAY FROM HER IS AGONY!

GRYNCH!

SO I'LL JUST TAKE ME A SHORT CUT THROUGH THE SEWERS OUTTA HERE.

BEN!

THIS IS MADNESS! I'D SWEAR SOMETHING WAS IN CONTROL OF HIM, MAKING HIM ACT AGAINST HIS WILL...

...YET HE'S SPEAKING COHERENTLY, NOT AT ALL AS IF HE WERE POSSESSED.

SURELY HE CAN'T TRULY HAVE TURNED AGAINST...

WHAT?!?

GOTCHA!

THE... *PAIN!* HE'S ALMOST *CRUSHING* MY ANKLE.

I CAN'T DEAL WITH THIS ON *MY* OWN. I'VE GOT TO CALL FOR HELP--CALL FOR *REED* AND *JOHNNY*.

MY FLARE GUN WILL...

NO YA DON'T, SWEETIE. I AIN'T SOME HALF-GASSED SUPER-BADDIE WHO DON'T KNOW TH' FF'S TRICKS.

YOU AIN'T FIRING OFF THAT FLARE TA SIGNAL TH' BIG BRAIN AN' THE KID.

CRUNCH!

NOW, I'M SORRY, SUZIE, BUT IT'S ALL OVER FER YOU!

BUT THE INVISIBLE GIRL IS NOT DONE YET...

MY POWERS ARE ALMOST USELESS AGAINST THAT INVULNERABLE HIDE OF HIS...

UNLESS...

YEOWTCH!

IT WORKED! MY FORCE BEAM STRUCK HIM ACROSS THE EYES, HIS ONLY WEAK SPOT!

I HAVEN'T DONE ANY PERMANENT DAMAGE, BUT THE EFFECT WAS LIKE WHACKING A PUPPY ACROSS THE NOSE WITH A ROLLED-UP NEWSPAPER.

NOW I HAVE TO THINK OF SOME WAY TO STOP HIM WITHOUT *KILLING* HIM... OR *ME!!*

HEY! COME BACK HERE YA BLASTID...!!!

THEN, ALMOST AS IF OBEYING THE THING'S BELLOW...

THIS IS RIDICULOUS. I'M GOING TO TIRE LONG BEFORE BEN. BUT AT LEAST I'VE LURED HIM AWAY FROM THE CROWDS.

I'VE GOT TO STOP HIM NOW-- BUT NOT ON HIS OWN TERMS. HIS STRENGTH IS A MATCH FOR MY FORCE-FIELDS.

BUT I CAN PUT THOSE FIELDS TO MORE THAN ONE USE...

IT HAS BEEN QUITE A WHILE SINCE SUSAN USED HER POWER IN JUST THIS FASHION.

SHE HAD COME TO THINK OF HER "BUBBLE BARRAGE" AS PRIMITIVE AND INEFFECTIVE.

USED THUSLY, HOWEVER, IT HAS PRECISELY THE DESIRED EFFECT. SUDDENLY THE THING IS WALKING ON COUNTLESS INVISIBLE MARBLES.

BUT HE HAS BEEN A FIGHTER TOO LONG TO BE SO EASILY UNDONE.

AND WHILE HIS BRUTE STRENGTH IS OF NO USE AGAINST THE FORCE-SPHERES THEMSELVES...

...IT CAN HAVE DEVASTATING **INDIRECT** EFFECT.

OH NO!

IT TAKES ONLY A FEW HEARTBEATS...

...AND THE INVISIBLE GIRL IS BURIED.

BURIED, BUT NOT OVERCOME.

MY FORCE-FIELD BUBBLE PROTECTED ME FROM THE DEBRIS. MAYBE MY BEST BET NOW WOULD BE TO PLAY POSSUM...

BUT...

AH HA! I THOUGHT THIS PILE A' JUNK WAS TOO BIG FER YOU TA BE SQUASHED UNDER IT.

OH, BLAST!

TIME FOR PLAN B!

NOT BAD, SUZIE. YA KNOCKED TH' WIND RIGHT OUTTA ME.

BUT... NOT... FER... LONG...

HE'S FORCING HIS WAY BACK. PUSHING THE FIELD IN ON ITSELF!

I CAN REDUCE THE FIELD'S VOLUME-- THAT SHOULD INCREASE ITS STRENGTH.

BUT I'VE NEVER HAD TO GO UP AGAINST BEN'S FULL POWER BEFORE.

IN THE PAST, SOMETHING HAS ALWAYS HELD HIM BACK. AN INNER RESISTANCE TO WHATEVER WAS CONTROLLING HIM.

BUT THAT ISN'T THERE THIS TIME.

THIS TIME HE REALLY SEEMS INTENT ON *KILLING* ME!

INTENT, SUSAN?

AS THE LAST VESTIGE OF THE PROTECTIVE FIELD DWINDLES AWAY IT APPEARS HE WILL **SUCCEED!**

BUT...

...S-SUZIE...

HE'S...HESITATING. AS IF WHATEVER IS CONTROLLING HIM IS WEARING OFF.

LIGHT RAYS WARP AS THEY PASS HER IRRADIATED CELLS, AND...

BLAST IT, SHE'S TURNED ***INVISIBLE!*** NOW WHICH WAY COULD SHE HAVE GONE?

TH-THAT WAS TOO CLOSE. I HAD BARELY ENOUGH STRENGTH TO TURN INVISIBLE FOR A FEW SECONDS.

GOT TO STAY OUT OF SIGHT NOW-- RECOVER...

GRIMM! NAUGHTY BOY! DIDN'T I TELL YOU TO ***DESTROY*** ANYONE WHO GOT IN OUR WAY? NOW, AFTER HER!!

JUST ONE SECOND, LADY, I...

NO "SECONDS", YOU BAD, BAD BOY.

DO AS YOU ARE TOLD. KARISMA COMMANDS!

EEP!

AND, AS THE MONSTROUS THING LUMBERS OFF TO SEEK OUT HIS DISTAFF PARTNER...

THE WOMAN CALLED KARISMA LAUGHS, AND LAUGHTER GIVES WING TO MEMORY.

ONLY A FEW WEEKS AGO SHE WAS NOT THE GLAMOROUS FEMME FATALE SHE IS NOW.

SHE WAS ONLY MARY BROWN, A PLAIN AND SIMPLE NAME FOR ONE WHO SAW HERSELF AS A PLAIN AND SIMPLE WOMAN

SHE WORKED THEN AS A RESEARCHER FOR THE GAYLORD COSMETIC CORPORATION.

AND IT WAS THERE SHE MADE HER DISCOVERY.

Gaylord

THIS MAKE-UP WILL REVOLUTIONIZE THE INDUSTRY, MR. LE GUYE.

I HAVE INCORPORATED INTO IT CERTAIN LONG-CHAIN ISOTOPES THAT EMIT RADIATION ON SPECIFIC WAVELENGTHS.

THE RESULT-- THE WEARER BECOMES LITERALLY IRRESISTIBLE.

OH, COME NOW, MISS... AH... BROWN...?

THEY SCOFFED. OF COURSE THEY SCOFFED. BUT SHE SHOWED THEM.

SHE NEEDED ONLY A QUICK SMEAR OF HER LIPSTICK TO ENSNARE YOUNG MARTIN LE GUYE...

...AND TO REDUCE HIS FATHER TO A WHIMPERING IDIOT.

AND THAT WAS WHEN MARY BROWN REALIZED SHE HAD CREATED MUCH, MUCH MORE THAN A NEW COSMETIC LINE.

SHE HAD CREATED KARISMA!

AND THAT INFORMATION WOULD BE OF GREAT USE TO THE INVISIBLE GIRL...

...IF ONLY SHE HAD IT.

IT'S SUDDENLY GONE SO QUIET. WHERE...?

OH NO!

SKRANG

I'M STILL TOO WEAK FOR A GOOD OFFENSE. GOT TO RISK A FORCE COLUMN...

...GOT TO GAIN TIME...

RUN AWAY AS MUCH AS YA LIKE, SUZIE. I CAN TELL JUST BY TOUCHIN' HOW WEAK YER FIELD IS.

TOO WEAK TA CUSHION YA FROM *THIS!!*

SLAM

THE FORCE OF THE IMPACT VIBRATES ALONG THE INVISIBLE LENGTH OF THE FIELD...

AND SUSAN STORM RICHARDS FINDS HERSELF PERCHED ATOP A QUIVERING TOWER OF JELLO.

FALLING... BUT AT LEAST MY WEAKEST FIELD IS GOOD FOR ONE THING...

YOU SHOULD HAVE LET YOURSELF HIT THE CONCRETE, MRS. RICHARDS.

IT WOULD HAVE SPARED YOU THE UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCE OF *DYING* AT THE HANDS OF A *FRIEND.*

SHE'S SNARED BEN AGAIN. BUT *HOW!?*

IT MUST BE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THAT VEIL. IT CAN'T BE TO HIDE HER TRUE IDENTITY. NOT THE WAY SHE KEEPS... *RAISING... IT...?*

ALL RIGHT, KARISMA. YOU MAY HAVE TURNED THE THING AGAINST ME YOU MAY HAVE *WON.* BUT I'VE GOT ONE ACE LEFT TO PLAY...

...SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE.

HER POWER IS STILL WEAK, BUT IT IS ENOUGH TO RENDER THE FINE MESH OF THE VEIL TRANSPARENT, AND REVEAL...

WHAT IN THE NAME OF...?

YOU HAVE UNCOVERED MY *SECRET*, SUSAN RICHARDS. BUT DOING SO WILL PROVE ULTIMATELY *FATAL!*

ALL THE MALE ONLOOKERS ARE MINE--MINE TO *COMMAND*. AND KARISMA COMMANDS...

DEATH TO THE INVISIBLE GIRL!!

A MOMENT AGO THEY WERE HUSBANDS AND FATHERS, SONS AND BROTHERS.

*NOW THEY ARE A SINGLE ORGANISM, THE MOST **DEADLY** OF ALL EARTHLY CREATURES.*

THE MOB!

THE MAKE-UP MUST HAVE SOME HYPNOTIC EFFECT ON HUMAN MALES. YET SHE HAD TO KEEP RAISING HER VEIL TO RENEW THE EFFECT. SO IT'S NOT SOMETHING THAT OPERATES ON CONVENTIONAL RADIATION LEVELS, BECAUSE THE VEIL IS STILL THERE, JUST INVISIBLE.

IT MUST OPERATE ON *VISIBLE WAVELENGTHS*... AND IF THAT'S RIGHT IT SHOULD HELP IF I DO...

THIS!

*KARISMA'S FACE--HER WHOLE **HEAD** BLINKS OUT OF SIGHT.*

AND FOR THE ONRUSHING MALES IT IS LIKE A SUDDEN DELUGE OF COLD WATER.

HANH?

WHAT IN BLAZES IS GOIN' ON? SUZIE... WHAT ARE YOU DOIN' HERE? YOU LOOK LIKE YOU BIN RUNNIN' A GAUNLET...

DID THIS *MATA HARI* LOOKALIKE DO SOMETHIN' TO YA?

IN A MATTER OF SPEAKING, BEN. HOLD HER. DON'T LET HER GET AWAY.

GEORGE! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'VE BEEN DOIN??

UH... UH...

BEN!

ALICIA! BABY, AM I EVER GLAD TO SEE *YOU!*

LOOKS LIKE HE'S *OKAY* NOW, MS. MASTERS.

THANK YOU, OFFICER. THANK YOU FOR HELPING ME FIND HIM.

HOLD TIGHT, BEN. THIS STRIP TORN OFF HER CAPE SHOULD MUFFLE THE EFFECTS OF HER MAKE-UP.

AND, A FEW MINUTES LATER...

WELL! THAT TAKES CARE A' THAT!

YES, PROVIDED IT'S A FEMALE OFFICER WHO UNWRAPS KARISMA AND CLEANS OFF THAT *GUNK*, WE SHOULDN'T BE HEARING FROM HER AGAIN.

AMAZING! SO MUCH ANGUISH, SO MUCH *DAMAGE*. AND CAUSED BY SUCH A SILLY POWER.

OH, I DON'T KNOW THAT I'D CALL IT ALL THAT SILLY, ALICIA. AFTER ALL, YOU COULD SAY THAT KARISMA WAS... AHEM...

...*COSMETICALLY* AWARE.

HA HA. THAT'S PRETTY GOOD. I NEVER THOUGHT OF THE INVISIBLE GIRL AS HAVING QUITE THAT KIND OF SENSE OF HUMOR.

BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW ALL THIS, ALICIA? YOU WERE LEFT OUT OF THE ACTION PRETTY EARLY ON.

NATURALLY BEN AND SUSAN TOLD ME ALL ABOUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED LATER, SHE-HULK.

WAIT, DO I HEAR REED'S VOICE?

YES, IT'S ME, ALICIA. KIND OF YOU TO STOP BY. I'M AFRAID I HAVE NO GOOD NEWS.

HOW IS SUSAN FARING NOW, REED?

AS WELL AS CAN BE EXPECTED... WHICH IS NOT WELL AT ALL. I FEEL SO ***HELPLESS***. MY WIFE IS AT DEATH'S DOOR, AND EVEN THE WORLD'S LEADING EXPERTS IN RADIATION CAN'T HELP.

PERHAPS THERE IS SOMEONE WE'VE FORGOTTEN?

NO, BRUCE. JOHNNY IS CONTACTING THE LAST EXPERTS NOW. THERE'S NO ONE ELSE.

YES, THERE IS!!

I FEEL LIKE SUCH AN ***IDIOT*** FOR NOT HAVING THOUGHT OF HIM BEFORE.

HE WAS MY INSTRUCTOR FOR ONE SEMESTER IN COLLEGE. AN ABSOLUTE ***GENIUS*** IN THE FIELD OF RADIATION TECHNOLOGY.

BUT A SAD TWISTED GENIUS NOW. A MAN WHO HAS SHUNNED SOCIETY, AND ITS MORAL STANDARDS.

THE ONLY MAN WHO CAN HELP US NOW IS ***OTTO OCTAVIUS***. THE MAN CALLED...

DOCTOR OCTOPUS!

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

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IN THE ARMS OF OCTOPUS!

A SMALL LOSS

A STAN LEE PRESENTATION BY JOHN BYRNE / WRITER-ARTIST / GLYNIS WEIN / COLORIST / MICHAEL HIGGINS / LETTERER / BOB BUDIANSKY / EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER / EDITOR IN CHIEF

DOCTOR OCTOPUS?!? LANGKOWSKI, HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?

NO, I HAVEN'T, REED, AND IF YOU'LL PUT ASIDE YOUR IMMEDIATE EMOTIONAL RESPONSE YOU'LL REALIZE I'M *RIGHT!*

OTTO OCTAVIUS IS THE ONLY MAN WHO CAN HELP US.

I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE I'M A PART OF ALL THIS, I'VE BEEN HANGING AROUND WITH THE *AVENGERS* FOR MONTHS NOW, BUT THAT DID NOTHING TO PREPARE ME FOR BEING ONE OF THE *FANTASTIC FOUR!*

WHEN THE THING ASKED ME TO TAKE HIS PLACE AFTER WE'D FINISHED OUR ***COSMIC BATTLE****, I GUESS I LOOKED UPON IT AS A REAL CHANCE TO LEGITIMIZE MYSELF.

EVER SINCE THE BLOOD TRANSFUSION FROM MY COUSIN BRUCE TRANSFORMED ME INTO THE ***SHE-HULK*** I'VE BEEN SOMETHING OF A ***JOKE*** IN THE PUBLIC EYE.

EVEN BECOMING A FULL-TIME ***AVENGER*** HELPED ONLY A LITTLE. I'D HOPED BEING ACCEPTED BY THE FANTASTIC FOUR WOULD BE THE CLINCHER --NOT TO MENTION AN ***HONOR***, AND A WHOLE LOT OF ***FUN***.

INSTEAD I FIND MYSELF STANDING HERE WITH ALL MY COLOSSAL STRENGTH ABSOLUTELY USELESS, JUST A BIG GREEN ORNAMENT TO THIS GATHERING OF INTELLECTS.

*SEE ***MARVEL SUPER HEROES: SECRET WARS***, ON SALE NOW--Bob.

"LOOK WHO I'M IN THE SAME ROOM WITH! ***MICHAEL MORBIUS***, THE WORLD'S LEADING AUTHORITY ON BLOOD RADIOLOGY--STRANGE LOOKING THOUGH HE MAY BE.

"THE TWO TOP EXPERTS IN THE FIELD OF RADIATION RESEARCH --CANADA'S ***WALTER LANGKOWSKI***...

"...AND MY OWN COUSIN ***BRUCE BANNER***, ALSO KNOWN AS THE INCREDIBLE ***HULK***!

"AND, TO TOP IT OFF, ***REED RICHARDS, MISTER FANTASTIC***, PERHAPS THE GREATEST BRAIN SINCE ***EINSTEIN***!"

I MAY HAVE BEEN A HOTSHOT LADY LAWYER IN CALIFORNIA, BUT COMPARED TO THIS GROUP I'M A KINDERGARTEN DROP-OUT.

AND WHY ARE THEY ALL HERE? TO TRY TO HELP REED'S WIFE, ***SUSAN STORM RICHARDS***, THE ***INVISIBLE GIRL***, WHO IS IN DANGER OF LOSING HER LIFE AND THAT OF HER UNBORN CHILD.

REED THINKS IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF AN UNKNOWN RADIATION THE F.F. WERE EXPOSED TO WHILE IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE!*

*F.F.'S #251-256--BOB.

THEY HAD DIFFICULTY WITH THE DELIVERY OF THEIR FIRST CHILD, LITTLE ***FRANKLIN*** BUT THIS SEEMS MUCH WORSE.

WAIT...WHAT'S REED SAYING...?

I APPRECIATE WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, WALTER. OTTO OCTAVIUS WAS ONCE THE WORLD'S TOP RADIATION MAN--

--BUT HE'S A CRIMINAL NOW, KNOWN TO BE PSYCHOTIC.

YOU CANNOT BELIEVE I WOULD RISK SUSAN'S LIFE BY DEPENDING ON THE AID OF A FELON.

WHY NOT, PROFESSOR RICHARDS? I AM HERE, AM I NOT? AND NO ONE CAN BE A GREATER CRIMINAL THAN AN ERSTWHILE ***LIVING VAMPIRE***.

NO, MICHAEL. YOUR SITUATION WAS DIFFERENT. YOU WERE THE VICTIM OF AN EXPERIMENT GONE WRONG.

NO, MORBIUS IS RIGHT, REED. WE CAN'T DISMISS OCTAVIUS BECAUSE HE'S ON THE SHADOW SIDE OF THE LAW. WE'VE ALL SEEN THAT SIDE OF THE STREET.

CONSIDER MY OWN SITUATION BEFORE I LEARNED TO CONTROL MY HULKING ALTER-EGO.

"ONCE OTTO OCTAVIUS WAS A SCIENTIST, A MAN MUCH LIKE YOU OR ME, SEEKING TO UNLOCK THE SECRETS OF NATURE.

"HIS CHOSEN FIELD WAS ***RADIOACTIVITY***, AND HE WAS THE VERY BEST.

"HE'D CREATED A SET OF ROBOT ARMS, TO DO THE DANGEROUS WORK AT LONG DISTANCE.

"IT WAS THOSE ARMS WHICH HAD HIS CO-WORKERS CALLING HIM ***DOCTOR OCTOPUS.***

"THEN, ONE DAY TRAGEDY STRUCK.

"A SMALL SCALE CHAIN-REACTION BLASTED HIM AND HIS ARMS WITH UNKNOWN RADIATION WAVELENGTHS.

"HE SURVIVED THE BLAST, BUT HE'D SUFFERED TERRIBLE BRAIN DAMAGE.

"HE BECAME ***PARANOID***, INSANE -- DANGEROUS."

THEY'RE ***JEALOUS*** OF ME! THEY WANT TO KEEP ME FROM MY ***WORK***... BUT I'LL SHOW THEM.

I'M STRONGER THAN ANY OF THEM!

"SOMEHOW HIS ARMS HAD BEEN PSIONICALLY LINKED TO HIS BRAIN.

"THEY NOW OBEYED HIS EVERY THOUGHT.'

"SO ***DOCTOR OCTOPUS*** QUICKLY BECAME A NAME TO BE FEARED, AS HE SOON PUT A DENT IN THE CAREER OF A YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED ***SPIDER-MAN.***

"THE WALL-CRAWLER FINALLY DEFEATED OCTOPUS, BUT SINCE THEN ***DOC OCK*** HAS RETURNED TIME AND TIME AGAIN...

"AND EACH TIME HE HAS BEEN DEFEATED, AND DRIVEN DEEPER INTO MADNESS."

BUT HOW DIFFERENT IS HIS STORY FROM THAT OF YOURS OR MINE, REED? WE MIGHT ALSO HAVE LOST EVERYTHING TO OUR OWN EXPERIENCES WITH RADIATION, MINE WITH THE ***GAMMA BOMB***, YOURS WITH ***COSMIC RAYS.***

PERHAPS ALL OCTAVIUS NEEDS IS, JUST ONCE, FOR SOMEONE TO APPEAL TO THE MAN HE USED TO BE.

AND, REED, I THINK ***YOU'RE*** JUST THE ONE TO DO IT!

PERHAPS... PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT, BRUCE. OCTOPUS WAS RECENTLY CAPTURED AGAIN. THE LAST I HEARD HE WAS BEING HELD AT THE SOUTH BROOKLYN PSYCHIATRIC FACILITY, FOR OBSERVATION. I SUPPOSE I COULD...

OH, DOCTOR LANSING, HOW IS MY WIFE?

STABLE, FOR THE MOMENT. WE'RE STILL GETTING SOME DISTURBING RADIATION LEVELS FROM THE CHILD, BUT FOR THE MOMENT THOSE SEEM TO HAVE PEAKED.

THEN, IT WOULD BE ALL RIGHT FOR ME TO GO IN AND SEE HER, ONE MORE TIME?

YES, BUT JUST YOU ALONE THIS TIME, PLEASE. THESE OTHER GENTLEMEN CAN WAIT OUT HERE.

"I DON'T WANT HER EXPOSED TO ANY MORE STRESS THAN SHE ALREADY IS."

SOON...

SHOULDN'T BE GONE FOR TOO LONG. THIS ONE LAST EXPERT IS...NEARBY.

THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT, ISN'T THERE? I KNOW YOU TOO WELL, DARLING. YOU'RE TRYING TO KEEP SOMETHING FROM ME.

NO, SUSAN... IT'S JUST THAT I...

DON'T, REED, PLEASE. SOMEHOW... THERE'S SOMETHING GOING ON THAT YOU DON'T LIKE... POSSIBLY SOMETHING DANGEROUS, I KNOW ...I KNOW THERE'S NOTHING I CAN SAY THAT WILL STOP YOU DOING WHAT YOU FEEL YOU MUST...

...BUT BE CAREFUL. BE VERY, VERY, CARE-FUL, REED.

I WILL, MY DARLING, NOTHING CAN STOP ME COMING BACK TO YOU AND OUR CHILD.

MY LOVE...

"...MY...LOVE..."

SHE SOUNDED SO WEAK, SO TERRIBLY FRAIL.

I'VE NEVER SEEN HER SLIP SO LOW.

PERHAPS OCTOPUS IS OUR ONLY HOPE, BUT IF I AM TO SECURE HIS ASSISTANCE I'D BEST STOP OFF AT OUR ***BAXTER BUILDING*** HEADQUARTERS.

SINCE THIS WILL BE AN ***OFFICIAL VISIT.*** I NEED TO CLEAN UP AND GO GET...

...THE FANTASTICAR.

IF I ***AM*** ABLE TO PERSUADE THE DOCTORS TO RELEASE OCTAVIUS INTO MY CARE I'LL NEED THIS VEHICLE TO GET HIM BACK TO THE HOSPITAL.

NOW, IT SHOULDN'T TAKE MORE THAN A FEW SECONDS TO REACH...

"...THE SOUTH BROOKLYN PSYCHIATRIC FACILITY."

I'LL LAND ON THEIR ROOF, SO AS NOT TO STARTLE THE PATIENTS IN THE YARD.

NOW, IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, THE PRESENT HEAD IS...

...DOCTOR JEFFERSON, IT WOULD SEEM OTTO OCTAVIUS IS MY LAST HOPE.

THAT'S AN AWFUL SITUATION YOU'RE IN, PROFESSOR RICHARDS, AND I WISH I COULD HELP.

BUT... OCTAVIUS IS... IS...

WELL, PERHAPS I SHOULD JUST ***SHOW*** YOU...

WILSON, OPEN UP NUMBER SEVEN, WOULD YOU?

YES, SIR.

THEY TOOK AWAY HIS ROBOT ARMS, OF COURSE, TO BE PUT UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

NEVERTHELESS, *THIS* IS OTTO OCTAVIUS, THE MAN CALLED *DOCTOR OCTOPUS!*

GREAT SCOTT!

DOCTOR JEFFERSON? IS IT TIME FOR MY SHOT?

NO, OTTO, YOU HAVE A VISITOR... A VERY SPECIAL VISITOR, A VERY FAMOUS MAN WHO WANTS TO SEE *YOU!*

OTTO, YOU'VE HEARD OF REED RICHARDS, HAVEN'T YOU?

MISTER FANTASTIC?

THAT'S RIGHT... *DOCTOR OCTAVIUS,* I'M REED RICHARDS, THE LEADER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR, AND I NEED YOUR HELP.

MY... HELP...?

THAT'S RIGHT, *DOCTOR OCTAVIUS.* MY WIFE IS VERY SICK, SHE HAS A KIND OF *RADIATION POISONING.* SOMETHING ONLY *YOU* CAN UNDERSTAND.

RADIATION?

YES, **DOCTOR OCTAVIUS,** YOU ARE ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE LEADING EXPERT IN THE FIELD, YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN HELP ME SAVE MY WIFE, THE ONLY ONE!

REMARKABLE! I WAS NOT AWARE OF RICHARDS HAVING HAD ANY PSYCHIATRIC TRAINING, YET HE IS TAKING **PRECISELY** THE CORRECT APPROACH, REINFORCING THROUGH REPETITION OCTAVIUS'S **TRUE** IDENTITY,

IT'S AN ABSOLUTELY **BRILLIANT** STRATEGY, AND, UNLESS I'M VERY MUCH MISTAKEN...

"...I BELIEVE...

"...IT'S GOING...

"...TO WORK!"

L-LET ME HELP...

OH, PLEASE, PLEASE LET ME HELP, LET ME GET BACK TO MY WORK... BACK TO **HELPING** PEOPLE. IT'S BEEN SO **LONG**, SO VERY, VERY LONG...

YES, DOCTOR OCTAVIUS, YOU CAN HELP, YOU **MUST** HELP.

CONGRATULATIONS, PROFESSOR RICHARDS. YOU'VE DONE WEEKS--PERHAPS MONTHS--OF WORK IN **MINUTES!**

I HOPE SO, DOCTOR JEFFERSON. NOW, IF WE CAN GET THE RELEASE PAPERS TAKEN CARE OF...

OF COURSE, COME ALONG NOW, OTTO, WE'RE GOING TO LET YOU TAKE A SHORT TRIP WITH PROFESSOR RICHARDS.

HI, FRANK. WHAT'S HAPPENING?

HMM? OH, HIYA, MYRT. JUST A LITTLE MEDICAL MIRACLE, I GUESS.

YOU MEAN, SOMEBODY FINALLY GOT THROUGH TO ***DOC OCK?*** WHO WAS IT?

NONE OTHER THAN ***MISTER FANTASTIC*** HIMSELF.

SWEETEST BIT OF PSYCHE-TALK I EVER DID SEE-- AN' I'VE BEEN FITTIN' STRAIGHT-JACKETS FOR A LOT OF...

...YEARS...?

WELL, IF REED RICHARDS REALLY DID GET THROUGH TO OCTAVIUS, SOMEBODY OUGHT TO WRITE IT UP FOR THE JOURNALS.

OCK WAS SO FAR GONE I DON'T THINK HE EVEN KNEW WHO HE WAS FOR SURE.

MAYBE.

I WONDER...

"I JUST WONDER..."

CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE SYMPTOMS MORE FULLY BEFORE WE GET THERE, RICHARDS?

OF COURSE, DOCTOR OCTAVIUS.

BRUCE WAS ABSOLUTELY RIGHT. OCTAVIUS IS COMPLETELY HIS OLD SELF ONCE AGAIN.

I ONLY HOPE AND PRAY HE WILL BE ABLE TO STAY THAT WAY!

THE PRIMARY MANIFESTATION SEEMS TO BE PURELY RATIONAL--A STEADILY INCREASING LEVEL OF UNKNOWN WAVELENGTHS FROM THE FETUS.

YES...

G-GO ON...

...I...

...I...

...FEEL... MOST... UNWELL...

"...MOST... UNWELL...

STAND BACK! STAY CLEAR! WE'RE TRANSPORTING DOCTOR OCTOPUS'S ARMS TO THE SUPER-MAX SECURITY HOLDING CELLS.

SUPER-MAX? ARE YOU KIDDING? WE'RE SEVENTY FEET UNDER-GROUND, SURROUNDED BY TWELVE-FOOT THICK REINFORCED CONCRETE AND GUARDS.

WHAT'S MORE SECURE THAN RIGHT HERE?

NYPD SECURITY

DON'T KNOCK IT, JACK! WE...

HEY, DID YOU SEE THAT?

NO, I...

WAIT! GOT IT! SUDDEN BILATERAL SHIFT ALONG VECTOR THREE-NINER-SEVEN...

HOLY SPIT!

THE ARMS! THEY'VE BEEN *ACTIVATED!*

EMERGENCY!

EMERGENCY!

ALL PERSONNEL TO SECURITY CORRIDOR 17B! EMERGENCY!

WHAT IN THE NAME OF...!?

UNGH!!

LOOK OUT!

ORDER... THE MEN TO FALL BACK, WE... CAN'T STOP... THOSE ARMS THIS WAY!

SECURITY CENTRAL! SECURITY CENTRAL! THIS IS NUMBER TWO, BAKER SQUAD. ORDER OUR MEN OUT! CLOSE CONTAINMENT DOORS!

EXECUTE PROGRAM C-57-D!!!

NYPD

NYPD

REPEAT!!! C-57-D!

C'MON! MOVE IT! MOVE IT! DID EVERYBODY GET CLEAR?

NOT EVERY-BODY.

"HANSON'S STILL IN THERE!!"

TAXI

"ATTENTION ALL UNITS! ATTENTION ALL UNITS!

"DOCTOR OCTOPUS'S ARMS ARE ACTIVE AND AT LARGE. REPEAT, ACTIVE AND AT LARGE!!"

!!!MOST UNWELL...

OCTAVIUS... WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S...!?

!!!WRONGGHH!!

HIS ARMS! GREAT SCOTT! IT'S OCTOPUS'S ROBOT ARMS!!

BLAST IT! SOMETHING MUST HAVE TRIGGERED HIS PSYCHOSIS!

BUT WHAT? WHAT? SURELY ONLY *SPIDER-MAN* COULD!!!

OF COURSE!

IT MUST HAVE BEEN ONE OF THOSE WRETCHED *DAILY BUGLE* POSTERS!

J. JONAH JAMESON HAS *"SPIDER-MAN--THREAT OR MENACE?"* PLASTERED ALL OVER THE CITY!

UNGH!!

THESE ARMS ARE TAXING THE LIMITS OF MY DUCTILITY.

GOT TO TETHER MY SELF SO I CAN *FIGHT!*

MY ELASTIC BODY HAS BEEN A TREMENDOUS BONUS IN MY SCIENTIFIC WORK, AND IN OUR BATTLES AGAINST EVIL.

BUT, I'VE NEVER HAD TO DEAL WITH AN *UNLIVING* ANALOGUE TO MY POWERS.

BUT WHERE IS OCTAVIUS HIMSELF?

I SAW HIM LIFTED FROM THE FANTASTI-CAR, THEN...

THERE!

"HE'S ON THAT ROOFTOP, BUT... HE'S NOT *DOING* ANYTHING, HE SEEMS... CONFUSED, DISORIENTED.

"COULD IT BE THAT SOME *OTHER MIND* IS CONTROL-LING HIS ARMS? THAT THIS ATTACK HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HIS PSYCHOSIS?

"OR... OR COULD IT BE THAT HE HAS SO TOTALLY SUBMERGED HIS DOCTOR OCTOPUS PERSONA THAT IT IS HIS *UNCON-SCIOUS MIND* THAT IS CONTROLLING THE ARMS?"

THAT MUST BE IT! OCTAVIUS HIMSELF IS UNAWARE OF THIS ASSAULT! SO I MUST FIND A WAY TO NEUTRALIZE THE ARMS BEFORE HIS MENTAL BAR-RIERS ARE BROKEN.

UNNHH!!

BUT, FIRST I HAVE TO *SURVIVE* LONG ENOUGH TO COUNTER-ATTACK.

EVEN IN MY ELASTIC STATE MY BODY STILL HAS THE USUAL NERVE ENDINGS AND GANGLIA--AND THE ARMS ARE HITTING *PRESSURE POINTS.*

SKRASH

THE ARMS SEEM TO HAVE "DECIDED" TO CARRY THE BATTLE IN-DOORS.

LUCKILY IT'S AFTER THE WORK-DAY. I DON'T HAVE THE ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION OF PROTECTING CIVILIANS.

BUT...THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING...

YES. IT'S...*UNGH*...**SUBTLE**, BUT THE ARMS ARE ALTERING THEIR ATTACK...

"...AS IF THEY ARE NOW BEING MORE DIRECTLY GUIDED.

"BUT THAT CAN ONLY MEAN..."

PERFECT! WHILE THE OTHER TENTACLES PIN REED RICHARDS THIS FOURTH ARM WILL CARRY ME UP TO THE BATTLE.

I FEEL AS IF SOME GREAT, NUMBING CLOUD HAS BEEN LIFTED FROM MY MIND. I SEE THINGS ONCE AGAIN WITH THE ICY CLARITY OF REVELATION.

DO YOU HEAR THAT, REED RICHARDS?

YOUR STUPID SCHEME WILL NOT WORK. I AM TOO BRILLIANT TO ALLOW YOU TO TRY TO SHOW YOUR SUPERIORITY OVER ME LIKE THIS.

OCTAVIUS, PLEASE! THIS IS NO TRICK, I PROMISE YOU!

YOU APPEAL TO OTTO OCTAVIUS, AND HE *MIGHT* HEED YOUR WORDS.

BUT HE IS A WEAKLING, AND A FOOL.

WORDS! WORDS! BUT YOUR WORDS ARE YOUR UN-DOING.

AND HE IS *NO MORE!*

DOCTOR OCTOPUS LIVES!!

AND DOCTOR OCTOPUS KILLS!

THIS IS POINTLESS! HE'S EASILY AS ADEPT WITH HIS TENTACLES AS I AM WITH MY OWN PLIABLE LIMBS.

YET THERE MUST BE SOME WAY TO DEFEAT HIM.

"SOMETHING I'M OVERLOOKING...

"OF COURSE! THE MANUAL CONTROLS ON THE CHEST PLATE!

"OCTAVIUS NO LONGER USES THEM, BUT THEY STILL RESPOND TO EVERY MOVEMENT OF HIS ARMS."

IF I CAN JUST REACH THEM...

"I DID IT!"

WHAT...

...THE...

UNHAND ME! HOW DARE YOU! HOW DARE YOU LAY HANDS ON DOCTOR OCTOPUS!

UNH... IT'S QUITE A STRAIN HOLDING THOSE CONTROL DIALS STATIONARY, ESPECIALLY WITH MY ARMS AT EXTENSION.

I'LL UNHAND YOU, OCTOPUS, BUT FIRST YOU'RE GOING TO *LISTEN!*

I CAME TO YOU IN GOOD FAITH, OCTOPUS. THERE WAS NO PRIDE INVOLVED, NO NEED ON MY PART TO PROVE ANY SUPERIORITY TO YOU, INTELLECTUAL OR OTHERWISE. IN THIS FIELD YOU ARE CLEARLY MY BETTER. IT COSTS ME NOTHING TO ADMIT THAT.

WHAT, THEN, DOES IT COST YOU, OCTOPUS? WHAT DOES IT COST YOU TO PUT ASIDE YOUR EGO FOR A MOMENT, PUT ASIDE YOUR LUST FOR POWER?

AN INNOCENT WOMAN AND HER UNBORN CHILD ARE AT *YOUR* MERCY, OCTOPUS, WOULD YOU LOSE VERY MUCH IF YOU *HELPED* THEM?

WELL, OCTOPUS? HOW GREAT A LOSS WOULD THIS BE FOR YOU, FOR YOUR EGO?

A SMALL LOSS PERHAPS.

BUT HOW CAN I KNOW THAT YOU ARE TO BE *TRUSTED?*

YOU'LL KNOW. YOU'LL KNOW BECAUSE OF THIS DEMONSTRATION OF GOOD WILL.

I RELEASE YOU NOW, OCTOPUS. YOUR ARMS ARE YOURS AGAIN TO CONTROL.

NOW, MAKE YOUR DECISION, OCTOPUS.

19.

"MAKE YOUR DECISION!"

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!

IT CAN'T HAVE *ENDED* LIKE THIS! IT CAN'T!

JOHNNY?

A-ALICIA. I'M OVER HERE.

MAY I STAY WITH YOU, JOHNNY? SHE-HULK HAS BEEN TRYING TO BE COM-FORTING, BUT...

YEAH--I KNOW. SHE MEANS WELL, BUT SHE'S JUST NOT *FAMILY.*

AND THIS IS A TIME FOR *FAMILY.* OH, HOW I WISH *BEN* WERE HERE.

HOW CAN THIS HAVE HAPPENED, ALICIA? AFTER ALL THE FF HAVE BEEN THROUGH, ALL THE LIFE AND DEATH BATTLES, ALL THE COSMIC ADVENTURES,

WE'VE CROSSED THE *UNIVERSE* TIME AND TIME AGAIN, AND COME BACK WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A SCRATCH. NOW... NOW *THIS!* SOMETHING THAT'S SO... SO *NORMAL,* SO EVERYDAY! TO COST US SO MUCH!

TRY TO BE STRONG, JOHNNY. REED WILL NEED YOUR STRENGTH, NOW THAT BEN IS NO LONGER WITH US.

AND SUSAN--I CANNOT BELIEVE SHE WOULD WANT YOU TO LET THIS *DESTROY* YOU. WE MUST GATHER OUR STRENGTHS TOGETHER. WE *ARE* A FAMILY, AS YOU SAID, AND WE MUST SURVIVE AS A FAMILY.

ALICIA, WAIT! HERE COMES REED!

WITH *DOCTOR OCTOPUS!*

JOHNNY! GOOD TO SEE YOU BACK, LAD! DID YOU CONTACT THOSE OTHER EXPERTS?

R-REED--SIS--SUE... THE BABY... THEY...

JOHNNY...?

S-SUE...?

SUE! NO!

NO!!

BRUCE! WHERE IS SUSAN? WHAT...?

REED! THANK HEAVENS YOU'RE BACK. WE DID EVERYTHING WE COULD, BUT... BUT...

BUT WHAT? WHAT'S GOING ON? WHY CAN'T ANYONE GIVE ME A *WHOLE* ANSWER?

ERGENCY

DOCTOR LANSING MY WIFE HOW...?

...HOW IS SHE...?

SUSAN IS AS WELL AS CAN BE EXPECTED, REED, UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES...

BUT I'M AFRAID SHE LOST THE BABY A LITTLE OVER THIRTY MINUTES AGO!!!

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APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

Fantastic Four®

the MASQUE of DOOM!

STAN LEE PRESENTS A TITANIC TALE OF TERROR, TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY...

THE MASQUE OF DOOM!

THE MEMBERS OF THE **FANTASTIC FOUR** HAVE FACED MUCH TOGETHER. THEY HAVE CROSSED THE **GALAXY**, INDEED THE **UNIVERSE**, AND HAVE SEEN THE WONDERS AND THE HORRORS OF INFINITE **TIME AND SPACE.**

THEY HAVE BATTLED ENEMIES, AND WEATHERED CONFLICTS THE VERY WHISPERED MENTION OF WHICH MIGHT SEND A LESSER MAN TREMBLING IN SEARCH OF REFUGE.

THEY HAVE KNOWN HEARTBREAK, TRIAL AND ANGUISH BEYOND WHAT ANY MERE MORTAL SHOULD BE CALLED UPON TO BEAR, AND OVER **ALL** THEY HAVE **TRIUMPHED.**

UNTIL TODAY.

FOR TODAY THE INDISCRIMINATE FINGER OF TRAGEDY HAS REACHED OUT TO TOUCH THEIR LIVES AS IT HAS NEVER DONE BEFORE.

JOHN BYRNE CHRONICLER / GLYNIS WEIN COLORIST / JIM NOVAK LETTERER / BOB BUDIANSKY EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR IN CHIEF

JUST OVER TWO HOURS AGO **SUSAN** AND **REED RICHARDS** LOST THE CHILD SHE WAS CARRYING. REED SUSPECTS THIS RESULTED FROM EXPOSURE TO UNKNOWN RADIATION DURING THEIR JOURNIES IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE.*

Y-YOU MUSTN'T DESPAIR, MY DARLING. EVERYTHING WAS DONE THAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE. YOU HAVE NOTHING FOR WHICH TO REPROACH YOURSELF.

I KNOW THAT, REED. IT'S JUST-- AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH SINCE WE BECAME THE FANTASTIC FOUR, TO HAVE SOMETHING LIKE *THIS* HAPPEN...

IT JUST SEEMS SO--SO *IMPOSSIBLE!*

*FF#'S 251-256--BOB.

THREE OTHERS SHARE THE GRIEF OF THE BEREAVED PARENTS...

...**ALICIA MASTERS**, BLIND SCULPTRESS AND BELOVED OF **BEN GRIMM**, **THE THING**, WHOSE CURRENT VENTURES HAVE TAKEN HIM TO AN ALIEN WORLD...

...SUSAN'S YOUNGER BROTHER, **JOHNNY STORM**, BETTER KNOWN AS **THE HUMAN TORCH**...

I'VE NEVER SEEN SIS AND REED LIKE THIS. SO... HELPLESS.

THEIR PAIN IS SO GREAT. IF THERE WERE ONLY SOMETHING I COULD DO, SOMETHING I COULD SAY...

I FEEL LIKE AN INTRUDER.

THE FF HAVE MADE ME WELCOME, BUT I DON'T *BELONG*. NOT *HERE*. NOT *NOW*.

...AND THE WOMAN CALLED **SHE-HULK**, LATEST ADDITION TO THE WORLD'S FIRST AND GREATEST SUPER-TEAM.

AND, OUTSIDE THE SPECIAL WARD...

I WANT TO THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR HELP, DR. *MORBIUS*, DR. *BANNER*, PROF. *LANGKOWSKI*. I'M SURE THE RICHARDSES ARE VERY GRATEFUL.

GRATEFUL FOR WHAT, DR. LANSING?

WE WERE GATHERED HERE BECAUSE WE'RE THE TOP MEN IN *RADIATION RESEARCH*. BUT IN THE END WE WERE ABLE ONLY TO STAND AROUND AND *WORRY*.

EVEN REED MANAGING TO RECRUIT *DOCTOR OCTOPUS* --THE WORLD'S LEADING RADIATION EXPERT-- WAS FINALLY, TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE.

SINCE HIS ARRIVAL HERE AT MERCY GENERAL HOSPITAL **OTTO OCTAVIUS** HAS STOOD SILENT, HIS THOUGHTS MASKED BEHIND THE GRIM, UNREADABLE SET OF HIS FEATURES.

NOW, AT **BRUCE BANNER'S** CASUAL REFERENCE, HE STIRS...

I WONDERED HOW LONG IT WOULD TAKE. YOU HAVE ALL PANDERED TO ME, PRAISING MY GENIUS, BEGGING MY HELP...

BUT I KNEW IT WOULD NOT BE LONG BEFORE YOU TIPPED YOUR HANDS, BEFORE YOU REVEALED THE *TRUE* REASON REED RICHARDS LURED ME HERE.

YOU ALL KNEW THE ***INVISIBLE GIRL*** WAS GOING TO MISCARRY, GOING TO LOSE THE BABY, AND YOU WANTED A SCAPEGOAT, SOMEONE YOU COULD ***BLAME*** FOR YOUR OWN INCOMPETENCE!

BUT THAT "SOMEONE" IS ***NOT*** GOING TO BE DOCTOR OCTOPUS!

FASTER ALMOST THAN THE EYE CAN FOLLOW, THE PSIONICALLY CONTROLLED ROBOT TENTACLE LASHES OUT...

UNGH!

THAT WAS VERY STUPID OF YOU, OCTAVIUS. WE ASKED YOU TO HELP BECAUSE OF A GENUINE RESPECT FOR YOUR UNEQUALED BRILLIANCE IN YOUR FIELD, NOT TO SET YOU UP.

BUT YOUR MADNESS HAS CORRUPTED YOUR LOGIC, AND NOW YOU HAVE MADE THE MISTAKE OF MAKING ME ***ANGRY.***

AND, AS MANY PEOPLE HAVE DISCOVERED...

...YOU WON'T LIKE ME WHEN I'M ***ANGRY!***

THE HOSPITAL FLOOR GROANS A PAINFUL PROTEST AS ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY POUNDS OF SCIENTIST BECOMES HALF A TON OF *INCREDIBLE HULK!*

AND NOW, OCTOPUS, LET'S CONTINUE OUR DISCUSSION ON MORE EQUAL TERMS.

FOOL! YOUR BRUTE STRENGTH IS NO MATCH FOR MY ARMS!

THEN, BEFORE THE "DEBATE" CAN GO ON...

BRUCE! *NO!*

REED, WHY ARE YOU STOPPING ME? OCTOPUS HAS TO BE RETURNED TO PRISON NOW!

BUT NOT BY YOU, BRUCE. YOU'RE NOT AS MUCH IN CONTROL OF THE *HULK* NOW AS YOU HAVE BEEN. I WON'T RISK A FULL SCALE *BATTLE* IN THIS HOSPITAL.

ESPECIALLY NOT WITH MY WIFE RESTING IN THE NEXT ROOM. SO CALM DOWN. *NOW!*

OCTOPUS IS MY RESPONSIBILITY, AND HE ISN'T GOING TO CAUSE ANY TROUBLE. HE'S GOING TO RETURN TO PRISON *VOLUNTARILY.*

WHAT?!?

ARE YOU *MAD*, RICHARDS? WHAT MAKES YOU BELIEVE I WOULD DO THAT?

OH, YOU'LL DO IT, OCTOPUS. YOU'LL DO IT BECAUSE YOU KNOW I'M A MAN OF MY WORD, AND YOU KNOW I WILL NOT REST UNTIL YOU ARE PROPERLY INCARCERATED.

DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?

FOR A MOMENT, OCTAVIUS' LIPS MOVE, BUT NO WORDS EMERGE. THE DREADFUL COLD CALM IN MISTER FANTASTIC'S VOICE CHILLS HIM TO THE VERY SOUL.

AND THEN...

Y-YES...

GOOD. I KNEW YOU'D SEE IT MY WAY. NOW, WAIT OVER THERE UNTIL I AM READY TO ESCORT YOU BACK TO CONFINEMENT.

REED, SUE IS RESTING COMFORTABLY NOW, BUT THERE'S AN IMPORTANT MATTER I NEED TO DISCUSS WITH BOTH OF YOU...

JUST ONE MOMENT, DR. LANSING. JOHNNY, YOU AND SHE-HULK ARE LEAVING NOW?

RIGHT, REED. ALICIA IS STAYING WITH SUE, SO I THOUGHT THIS MIGHT BE AS GOOD A TIME AS ANY TO INTRODUCE SHE-HULK TO THE *BAXTER BUILDING.*

GOOD IDEA, SON. SINCE SHE'LL BE TAKING UP RESIDENCE THERE YOU CAN USE THIS TIME TO PROGRAM HER DATA INTO THE DEFENSE SYSTEMS.

THAT'S WHAT I FIGURED. THERE'S A LOT OF STUFF IN OUR HEADQUARTERS THAT WE JUST TAKE FOR GRANTED.

AND I DON'T WANT TO BLOW UP *NEW YORK* BY PRESSING THE WRONG BUTTON...

THUS, A FEW MINUTES LATER, ON THE HOSPITAL ROOF...

YOU CAN FLY TO THE BAXTER BUILDING UNDER YOUR OWN POWER, BUT WHAT AM *I* DOING UP HERE?

I THOUGHT WE'D SAVE A LITTLE TIME GETTING TO OUR HQ IF WE USED ONE OF THE *FANTASTICARS.*

SINCE NONE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE CURRENTLY LIVING IN THE BAXTER BUILDING REED DESIGNED A LONG RANGE REMOTE CONTROL FOR SOME OF THE SYSTEMS.

YOU'LL HAVE TO HAVE ONE OF THESE BELT-BUCKLE INSTRUMENT PACKS INSTALLED IN YOUR UNIFORM, NOW THAT WE'RE BACK FROM THE SECRET WARS...*

*DON'T MISS THAT CONTINUING DRAMA IN ***MARVEL SUPER HEROES: THE SECRET WARS,*** EVERY MONTH--**BOB.**

MOMENTS LATER...

AND, VOILA! OUR MEDIUM RANGE FANTASTICAR AT YOUR SERVICE!

AMAZING! WHAT'S THE RANGE ON THAT SIGNAL GADGET?

A LITTLE OVER TWO HUNDRED MILES. REED FIGURED THERE WAS NO REASON TO EXTEND MUCH BEYOND THE LOCATION OF THE HOUSE HE AND SUE ARE LIVING IN.

AND WHERE EXACTLY IS THAT? I KNOW THEY'VE ADOPTED "SECRET IDENTITIES," BUT NOT EVEN THE *AVENGERS* KNOW *WHERE.*

NOT TOO SURPRISING, IS IT? SEVERAL OF THE AVENGERS ARE SECRETIVE ABOUT THEIR TRUE IDENTITIES. YOURSELF FOR ONE.

WELL, IT'S NOT THAT I'M BEING SECRETIVE, REALLY.

IT'S JUST... NO ONE EVER *ASKED!*

OKAY, I'M ASKING...

...BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME IF YOU *REALLY* DON'T WANT TO.

"NO, THAT'S OKAY," *SAYS SHE-HULK.* "IT'S NO BIG DEAL, TO BE HONEST.

"ONCE UPON A TIME, IN A MYTHICAL LAND CALLED *CALIFORNIA*...

"... THERE LIVED A YOUNG LADY LAWYER NAMED *JENNIFER WALTERS.*

"AND HER ONLY CLAIM TO FAME WAS THAT SHE WAS THE *COUSIN* OF BRUCE BANNER, A.K.A. THE HULK.

"ONE DAY BRUCE TURNED UP ON HER DOORSTEP.

"THIS WAS BEFORE HE'D LEARNED TO CONTROL THE HULK, AND HE'D DECIDED TO SEEK *LEGAL* AID.

"UNFORTUNATELY, HIS *TIMING* WAS LOUSY. JENNIFER HAD GOTTEN HERSELF AT CROSS PURPOSES WITH THE *MOB*...

"... AND ONE DAY THE *MOB* DECIDED TO *DO* SOMETHING ABOUT HER...

"THEY MADE THEIR MOVE ON A LONELY STRETCH OF ROAD.

"THE CAR WAS WRECKED. BRUCE AND JEN *SHOULD* HAVE BEEN KILLED.

BLAM

"BUT THEY WEREN'T.

"IN FACT, BRUCE WALKED AWAY ALMOST WITHOUT A SCRATCH. JENNIFER WASN'T SO LUCKY.

"TO SAVE HER LIFE, BRUCE WAS FORCED TO GIVE HER A BLOOD TRANSFUSION -- HIS *OWN* BLOOD.

"THEN HE GOT HER TO A HOSPITAL, AND DID ONE OF HIS FAMOUS DISAPPEARING TRICKS.

"A LITTLE TOO SOON AS IT TURNED OUT. THE MOB WASN'T FINISHED WITH JENNIFER YET.

"AND THAT WAS WHEN SHE DISCOVERED SHE'D GOTTEN MORE THAN *BLOOD* FROM HER FAMOUS COUSIN.

"IN A WAY, JENNIFER WALTERS *DIED* THAT DAY.

"AND THE SAVAGE *SHE-HULK* WAS BORN... "

I SOON LEARNED I HAD ONE MAJOR ADVANTAGE OVER THE HULK AS HE WAS THEN. I DIDN'T HAVE QUITE HIS *STRENGTH*, BUT I DID KEEP MY OWN *INTELLECT*.

SO I HONKED AROUND CALIFORNIA FOR A WHILE, FINDING THAT BEING SHE-HULK WAS A LOT MORE *FUN* THAN BEING JEN WALTERS.

THEN, NOT LONG AGO, I WAS INVITED TO JOIN THE *AVENGERS*. NEEDLESS TO SAY, I ACCEPTED. WHO WOULDN'T?

AND THAT BRINGS US UP TO A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO, WHEN THE *THING* ASKED ME TO SUB FOR HIM IN THE F.F.

WHICH *HAS* TO BE A LOT CLASSIER OFFER THAN THE AVENGERS...

WELL, HEADS UP, JADE LADY, THERE'S THE BAXTER BUILDING!

"AND...THERE! YOU SEE THOSE GLOBES POPPING UP ON THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE ROOF? THEY'RE *SCANNERS*, AND STORED IN THEIR DATA BANKS IS INFO ON EVERY KNOWN TYPE OF FLYING CRAFT, OR PERSON.

"RIGHT NOW, HARMLESS, INVISIBLE WAVES ARE PROBING US, CHECKING US AGAINST THE DATA FILE, AND ALERTING THE REST OF THE BUILDING'S DEFENSE SYSTEMS THAT WE'RE NON-HOSTILE.

"IT ALL TAKES ABOUT A NANO-SECOND."

PILOT-TYPES LIKE REED AND BEN USUALLY LAND THE FANTASTICAR MANUALLY, BUT THIS IS THE POINT I PREFER TO SWITCH OVER TO THE BAXTER BUILDING'S AUTO-GUIDANCE SYSTEMS.

ON THE ROOFTOP FAINT LINES DEFINE THEMSELVES, AND WIDEN AS THE DOORS TO THE HANGAR DECK OPEN.

WOW! I'VE SEEN PICTURES OF THE INTERIOR OF YOUR... *OUR* HEADQUARTERS, BUT I NEVER GOT A REAL SENSE OF ITS SIZE!

YEAH, REED DID SOME SPACE-EFFECTIVE STUDIES BEFORE WE MOVED IN, AND WHEN WE'VE HAD TO REBUILD OVER THE YEARS.

THE RESULT IS THAT THE TOWER ALMOST SEEMS BIGGER INSIDE THAN OUT.

BUT WITH ALL THESE AUTOMATIC SYSTEMS, AREN'T YOU AFRAID SOME *ENEMY* WILL FIGURE OUT A WAY TO CONTROL THE BUILDING FROM OUTSIDE?

REED THOUGHT OF THAT. BELIEVE ME, HE'S DESIGNED THIS PLACE TO BE ON GUARD EVEN AGAINST OUR *FRIENDS*, JUST IN CASE.

ANYWAY, SEE THAT BIG BUTTON? THERE'S ABOUT *FIFTY* OF THEM THROUGHOUT OUR HQ. ONE PUSH AND THE DEFENSE SYSTEM BLOCKS ALL EXTERNAL SIGNALS ON ALL FREQUENCIES.

AND, SPEAKING OF SECURITY DEVICES...

HERE'S SOMETHING ELSE WE'LL HAVE TO EQUIP YOUR COSTUME WITH...

ALL THE ELE-VATORS ARE ON A BEAM-LOCK.

PING!

TO CALL A CAR YOU ACTIVATE THE SOLENOID IN YOUR BELT-BUCKLE AND HEY-PRESTO...

...INSTANT ELEVATOR. NOW, LET'S GET ON WITH THE GUIDED TOUR...

AND SO, A FEW HOURS LATER...

WOW! I SURE HOPE NO ONE EXPECTS ME TO GET ALL THIS ON ONE GO!

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. WE'VE BEEN HERE FOR *YEARS*, AND I'M *STILL* NOT SURE WHERE EVERYTHING IS.

ANYWAY, THE NEXT LEVEL DOWN IS RESIDENTIAL, SO LET ME BUY YOU A CUP OF COFFEE, AND WE'LL CALL THE HOSPITAL AND CHECK WITH REED AND SUE.

BUT, AS THEY HEAD FOR THE ELEVATOR AGAIN...

WHAT'S THIS DOOR, JOHNNY? IT LOOKS HEAVY ENOUGH TO STOP A *TANK!*

IT IS.

IT HAS TO BE.

THIS... WELL, I GUESS YOU'D SAY THIS IS THE CLOSEST THING THE FF HAVE TO A *TROPHY ROOM.*

TROPHY ROOM?

FUNNY, I NEVER THOUGHT OF YOU AS BEING THE TYPES FOR DISPLAYING THE EARS AND THE TAIL.

AND WE'RE NOT. THIS IS JUST THE ROOM WHERE WE STORE ALL THE THINGS WE'VE COLLECTED FROM AROUND THE WORLD, AND AROUND THE UNIVERSE.

STUFF THAT'S EITHER *DANGEROUS*, OR SOMETHING REED HASN'T FIGURED OUT YET.

AND, OF COURSE...

WOW!

THE MASK OF DOCTOR DOOM!

I'VE READ THAT THAT WAS THE ONLY THING TO SURVIVE HIS GETTING MIXED UP IN THAT BATTLE BETWEEN *TERRAX* AND THE *SILVER SURFER*...*

HE'S THE ONE FF ENEMY I CAN'T SAY I'M SORRY I WON'T GET THE CHANCE TO TANGLE WITH.

YEAH, WELL DON'T SAY IT *TOO* LOUD. DOOM ALWAYS HAD A WAY OF ZAPPING US--MAYBE EVEN FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE.

*IN ISSUE #260 -- BOB.

"LET'S GO GET THAT COFFEE..."

MEANWHILE...

TWO HUNDRED MILES TO THE NORTH LIES PLEASANT SUBURBAN BELLE PORTE, CONNECTICUT.

A QUIET, PEACEFUL COMMUNITY WHERE REED AND SUSAN RICHARDS HAVE CHOSEN TO TRY TO CREATE A MORE "NORMAL" LIFE.

AND HERE, IN THE BACKYARD OF THE RESIDENCE OF "REED AND SUSAN BENJAMIN"...

NO ONE HOME.

IT SEEMS LIKE THERE'S NEVER ANYONE HOME. I LIVE RIGHT ACROSS THE STREET, AND I DIDN'T EVEN SEE THEM MOVE IN!

ALMA!

WHAT...? OH, ALICE... ALICE WINCHELL... AH ...HOW ARE YOU AND DANNY TODAY?

WE'RE JUST FINE, THANK YOU. BUT I THINK WE'RE BOTH WONDERING WHAT YOU'RE DOING, SNOOPING AROUND THE BENJAMINS' HOUSE?

I... AH... I'M NOT SNOOPING. I... THOUGHT I SAW SOMEONE IN THE HOUSE, AND SINCE I KNOW THE BENJAMINS AREN'T HOME...

NOT QUITE QUICK ENOUGH, ALMA. WITH THOSE MILLION-POWER BINOCULARS YOU SWEEP THE WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD WITH YOU WOULDN'T NEED TO COME OVER TO CHECK FOR AN INTRUDER.

OH, ALL RIGHT, SO I WAS *CURIOUS*. AREN'T YOU? I MEAN, THEY HAVEN'T GONE OUT OF THEIR WAY TO JOIN THE COMMUNITY, HAVE THEY?

WHY DO YOU SAY THAT? JUST BECAUSE THEY'RE THE ONLY FAMILY IN ALL BELLE PORTE THAT YOU HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO CLOCK A SCHEDULE FOR?

AND, BACK IN **NEW YORK**, AND COMPLETELY UNAWARE OF THIS SEEMINGLY INNOCENT DISCUSSION...

...SO IT SEEMS TO ME REED AND SUE ARE GOING TO HAVE ENOUGH ON THEIR MINDS.

PLAYING SUPER HERO MAY NOT SEEM TOO IMPORTANT TO THEM JUST NOW.

YOU MEAN YOU THINK THIS COULD SIGNAL ANOTHER BREAK-UP FOR THE FF? NO, WE THREW THAT RECORD OUT A LONG TIME AGO, JEN. WE...

GOOD GRIEF! WHAT IN THE WORLD IS THAT?!

OUR INTRUDER ALARM! THE BUILDING'S BEEN BREECHED!

BUT THAT CAN'T BE! THE SCANNERS WOULD HAVE DETECTED ANY APPROACHING FOE...

GOT TO CHECK IT OUT...

FLAME ON!

TORCH! WAIT FOR ME!

A FEW SECONDS LATER, ONE FLOOR ABOVE...

THE TROPHY ROOM!

BUT... THAT DOOR WAS BLASTED OUT FROM INSIDE!

COULD ONE OF OUR MYSTERY ARTIFACTS HAVE BEEN SOMEHOW TRIGGERED?

BLAST--THE AUTOMATIC LIGHTING HAS GONE.

BUT-- THAT'S NO PROBLEM FOR ME. I'LL JUST...

OH CRUD! DOOM'S MASK IS GONE! BUT WHO COULD HAVE SNATCHED IT?

HE MUST HAVE LEFT SOME KIND OF CONTINGENCY PROGRAM WITH HIS ROBOT DOUBLES. BUT...

JOHNNY-- WHAT'S HAPPENED?

STAY CLEAR, SHE-HULK! IT LOOKS LIKE...

UNGH!

SHE-HULK! WHAT HIT YOU? ARE YOU OKAY?

I'M... FINE... SOME KIND OF HIGH-INTENSITY ENERGY BLAST...

DIDN'T EVEN SEE IT COM--

WAIT...

LOOK OUT!

SHRAK-T!

POWER BEAMS!

OKAY... I DON'T KNOW WHO THAT IS LURKING OUT IN THE CORRIDOR...

... BUT HE'S ABOUT TO LEARN HE'S NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN PLAY NASTY GAMES...

THEN, AS THE HUMAN TORCH DIRECTS A SEARING TORRENT OF LIVING FLAME IN THE DIRECTION OF THE ATTACK...

I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

THE MASK!

IT'S DOOM'S MASK!

I KNEW HE'D HAVE SOME KIND OF CONTINGENCY PLAN-- SOME WAY OF ATTACKING US EVEN IF HE HIMSELF GOT KILLED!

TORCH--YOUR FIRE-BLASTS AREN'T DOING ANY GOOD. FLY CLEAR...

...AND I'LL SWAT THIS THING LIKE...

OH NO!

HOW CAN IT MOVE SO FAST? IT'S LIKE IT SENSED WHAT I WAS GOING TO DO BEFORE...

UNGH!

MULTI-VOLT ELECTRICAL SHOCK... I CAN TAKE IT...I THINK... IT KEEPS GETTING STRONGER...

MAY REACH MY THRESHOLD SOON UNLESS...

WHAT TH'...?!

IT'S FLYING AWAY!

MISSED!

DON'T JUST STAND THERE DAYDREAMING, SHE-HULK!

THAT THING'S NOW LOOSE IN THE REST OF THE TOWER COMPLEX!

NO TELLING WHAT IT MIGHT DO IF WE DON'T STOP IT!

BUT BEFORE THE HUMAN TORCH CAN MOVE A FOOT BEYOND THE DOORWAY...

UNF!

CONCUSSION FIELD... CAN'T STAY IN THE AIR...

SHE-HULK... YOU'RE STRONGER THAN I AM. TRY TO FIGHT YOUR WAY THROUGH THE FIELD.

SAVE YOUR ORDERS FOR THE NEW KIDS IN TOWN, TORCH. I KNOW WHAT TO DO.

SHE HURLS HERSELF AGAINST THE FIELD, FORCING HER WAY AGAINST A MILLION INVISIBLE JACKHAMMERS.

INCH BY AGONIZING INCH SHE MOVES, HER GAMMA ENHANCED MUSCLES SCREAMING FOR RELIEF.

BUT SHE-HULK DOES NOT STOP, DOES NOT FALTER IN HER FORWARD PROGRESS. SHE HAS LEARNED, IN HER BRIEF CAREER, THAT THERE IS NO ROOM IN THIS MOST DANGEROUS GAME FOR QUITTERS.

BESIDES, THERE IS HERE A MATTER OF PRIDE. SHE HAS BEEN, AT TIMES, A BIG GREEN JOKE.

SHE HAS NO INTENTION OF BEING A JOKE AGAIN.

SO STAY YOUR LAUGHTER AS THE FIELD SUDDENLY DISSIPATES AND SHE TUMBLES HEADLONG THE LENGTH OF THE CORRIDOR...

...AND BEYOND...

NUTS!

BLASTED, ZAPPED, AND TOSSED RIGHT OUT OF THE BUILDING!

SO MUCH FOR AN AUSPICIOUS DEBUT AS A MEMBER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.

AND NOW THE TORCH IS ON HIS OWN UP THERE.

WELL... RIGHT NOW THAT'S THE LEAST OF MY PROBLEMS.

A FALL LIKE THIS ISN'T GOING TO DO MUCH MORE THAN SHAKE ME UP A BIT...

BUT I'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING TO MINIMIZE THE DAMAGE I'M GOING TO CAUSE...

JUST HOPE NOBODY'S RIGHT UNDER...

RUNCH!

MEANWHILE, APPROACHING THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE BUILDING...

SUE WAS SLEEPING, SO DOCTOR LANSING COULDN'T TELL US EVERYTHING HE WANTED TO. I FEAR THIS ORDEAL IS NOT YET FINISHED.

MOMENTS LATER...

I WONDER HOW SHE HULK IS GETTING ON WITH HER INITIATION INTO OUR LITTLE GROUP.

I THINK SHE WAS A GOOD CHOICE TO TAKE OVER FOR BEN, UNTIL HE RETURNS. I ONLY HOPE, FOR HIS SAKE, THAT THAT WILL BE SOON. IT'S...

REED!

LOOK OUT!

JOHNNY! WHAT IN...?

THEN, BEFORE MISTER FANTASTIC HAS EVEN A FRACTION OF A SECOND TO COLLECT HIS WITS...

WE'RE UNDER ATTACK! BUT BY WHOM?

THE BUILDING LOOKED SECURE AS I APPROACHED JUST NOW...

THE ANSWER AMAZES AND CONFOUNDS EVEN REED RICHARDS...

GREAT SCOTT!

DOOM'S MASK! BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!

IMPOSSIBLE IT MAY BE, YET AN IMAGINATIVE OBSERVER MIGHT ALMOST DETECT A KIND OF GRIM DELIGHT ON THE FUSED FEATURES OF THE MASK AT THE SUDDEN PRESENCE OF DOOM'S OLD ENEMY...

BUT THE SUPER ANALYTICAL MIND OF MISTER FANTASTIC HAS NO TIME TO NOTICE SUCH A DETAIL.

EYE BLASTS? HOW? THE MASK'S ABILITY TO FLOAT IN THE AIR WOULD BE A NATURAL EXTENSION OF THE ANTI-GRAVITY POWER OF THE REST OF DOOM'S ARMOR...

BUT I HAVE NEVER OBSERVED THE MECHANISMS OF THE MASK AS BEING CAPABLE OF GENERATING CONCUSSIVE BLASTS.

AND THE WAY IT MANEUVERS... LIKE SOMETHING ALIVE! COULD DOOM HAVE PROGRAMMED INTO IT SUCH AN ELABORATE CONTINGENCY PLAN?

IT SEEMS UNLIKELY, YET-- WHAT OTHER ANSWER IS THERE?

EVEN AS HIS REMARKABLE ELASTIC FORM ENGULFS THE MASK, HIS MIND RACES...

DOOM IS KNOWN TO BE ***DEAD***--AND BY ALL ACCOUNTS A DEATH HE COULD NOT HAVE ESCAPED, AS HE HAS ESCAPED SO MANY DEATHS IN THE PAST.

UNH--THE MASK IS EXERTING A POWERFUL REPULSION FIELD...

CAN'T HOLD ON!

THIS IS POINTLESS!

NEITHER JOHNNY NOR I HAVE THE POWER TO PHYSICALLY OVERCOME THE MASK.

YET--THERE MUST BE SOME LOGICAL WAY TO STOP IT.

THE PRECISION AND COMPLEXITY OF ITS MOVEMENTS AND ATTACK IS THE OBVIOUS CLUE.

I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT EVEN SOMEONE OF DOOM'S PARANOID GENIUS COULD HAVE PRE-PROGRAMMED THIS ASSAULT...

THEREFORE...

OF COURSE! THE ONLY SOLUTION MUST BE THAT THE ATTACK IS BEING DIRECTED FROM OUTSIDE!

AND THE COUNTER-MOVE TO THAT...

IS TO SEAL THE BAXTER BUILDING FROM EXTERNAL SIGNALS!

THE BUTTON IS PUSHED...

AND AS SUDDENLY AS IT HAD BEGUN...

THE ATTACK IS OVER!

WAY TO GO, BROTHER-IN-LAW!

KLANK!

TWO HOURS LATER...

WELL, REED, YOU'VE FINISHED YOUR ANALYSIS. WHAT DID YOU FIND OUT?

NOTHING I HAD NOT ALREADY DEDUCED, I'M AFRAID, JOHNNY.

THIS ATTACK WAS *NOT* PART OF ANY PRE-PROGRAMMED CONTINGENCY.

THAT'S WHAT YOU SAID BEFORE. BUT I'M STILL NOT SURE HOW YOU FIGURED IT OUT.

SIMPLE DEDUCTIVE REASONING, SON. I'D ALREADY EXAMINED THE CIRCUITRY OF THE MASK WHEN WE FIRST ACQUIRED IT.

THERE IS NOTHING IN THE NORMAL MACHINERY THAT COULD GENERATE THE EFFECTS WE ENCOUNTERED. SOMEONE MUST HAVE BEEN TRANSMITTING SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS.

WAIT A MINUTE! ARE YOU SAYING THAT EVEN THOUGH DOOM IS DEAD, SOMEONE ELSE MAY BE USING HIS WEAPONRY AGAINST US?

THAT IS ONE CLEAR POSSIBILITY, SHE-HULK. BUT THERE IS ANOTHER.

THE LATVERIAN EMBASSY HAS PERSISTED IN DENYING THE DEATH OF THEIR RULER.

THIS COULD BE MORE THAN SIMPLE POLITICS.

SOMEHOW, SOME WAY... DOCTOR DOOM MAY STILL BE ALIVE!

NEXT ISSUE: THE LONG AWAITED RETURN OF **WYATT WINGFOOT**--PLUS ONE OF THE GREATEST MENACES THE F.F. HAS EVER FACED...

TERMINUS!

MARVEL MASTERWORKS
SPECIAL FEATURES

The Thing #7, January 1984
"What Th'?!"
Ben Grimm airs his grievances with Marvel in an Assistant Editors' Month backup story.

The Marvel Fumetti Book #1, April 1984
Take a wild and wacky photo tour through the Marvel Bullpen with John Byrne!

Marvel Fanfare #15, July 1984
"That Night…"
Barry Windsor-Smith explores the FF's greatest rivalry in this all-time classic.

Fantastic Four Special Edition #1, May 1984
Fantastic Four Special Edition reprinted Lee and Kirby's *Fantastic Four Annual* #1 with a new five-page Namor origin sequence that took the place of the original story's page eighteen. Byrne also contributed a new wraparound cover and a gallery of FF pinups.

Writers/Artists: John Byrne (*The Thing* No. 7; *Fantastic Four Special Edition* No. 1)
Barry Windsor-Smith (*Marvel Fanfare* No. 15)
Al Milgrom (*Marvel Fanfare* No. 15)

Writer: Mike Carlin (*The Marvel Fumetti Book* No. 1)

Photos: Vince Colletta (*The Marvel Fumetti Book* No. 1)

Special Effects: Arthur Adams (*The Marvel Fumetti Book* No. 1)
Bill Sienkiewicz (*The Marvel Fumetti Book* No. 1)

Letterers: Clem Robins (*The Thing* No. 7)
Michael Higgins (*The Marvel Fumetti Book* No. 1)
Joe Rosen (*The Marvel Fumetti Book* No. 1)
Jim Novak (*Marvel Fanfare* No. 15)
Rick Parker (*Fantastic Four Special Edition* No. 1)

Colorists: Bob Sharen (*The Thing* No. 7)
Barry Windsor-Smith (*Marvel Fanfare* No. 15)
Glynis Wein (*Fantastic Four Special Edition* No. 1)

Editors: Ann Nocenti (*The Thing* No. 7; *The Marvel Fumetti Book* No. 1)
Louise Simonson (*The Marvel Fumetti Book* No. 1)
Al Milgrom (*Marvel Fanfare* No. 15)
Tom DeFalco (*Fantastic Four Special Edition* No. 1)

Color & Art Reconstruction: All Thumbs Creative (*The Thing* No. 7; *Marvel Fanfare* No. 15 *Fantastic Four Special Edition* No. 1)
Logan Kelleher (*The Marvel Fumetti Book* No. 1)

WHAT TH'?!

THING

STAN LEE IS UNABLE TO PREVENT THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY BY...

JOHN BYRNE – STORY & ART

CLEM ROBINS – LETTERING

BOB SHAREN – COLORING

ANN NOCENTI – EDITING

JIM SHOOTER – BODY SURFING IN SAN DIEGO

THOSE BLANKETY-BLANK IDJITS! I KNEW THIS WOULD HAPPEN SOONER OR LATER!

I TOLD **REED!** I SAID, "IF WE'RE GONNA LET THEM CLOWNS AT **MARVEL** DO COMIC BOOKS ABOUT US WE'RE GONNA HAFTA WATCH 'EM EVERY STEP OF THE WAY."

BUT DID HE LISTEN? OHHHH NO. "DON'T WORRY, **BEN,**" HE SAYS, "I TRUST **LEE** AND **KIRBY** IMPLICITLY!"

BUT LEE AN' KIRBY AIN'T DOIN' OUR BOOK NO MORE--AN' NOW **THIS!**

ALMOST SILENTLY THE UNIQUE SKY-CYCLE JETS AWAY FROM THE **BAXTER BUILDING**.

IT WUZN'T BAD ENOUGH WHEN I COULDN'T CONVINCE 'EM A **SUPERSTAR** LIKE ME COULD CARRY A WHOLE BOOK **ALONE**...

ALL THEM YEARS I HAD TA PUT UP WITH SHARIN' TH' SPOTLIGHT WITH A DIFFERENT SECOND-RATER EVERY ISSUE...

NOW... **THIS!**

ONLY A WHISPER OF WIND MARKS THE PASSAGE OF THE THING TOWARDS A ROOF-TOP HIGH OVER **PARK AVENUE.**

AND, ON THE TENTH FLOOR...

AFTERNOON, SWEETIE! DON'T BOTHER T' ANNOUNCE ME.

WHA...?

O MY LORD! THE THING!

WAIT! MR. **GRIMM!** YOU FORGOT TO SIGN THE REGISTER!

NAH...I DIDN'T **FERGET**...

MEANWHILE, UNAWARE OF THEIR IMPEND-ING VISITOR...

JOHN, I'VE REDRAWN THIS PAGE **TWELVE TIMES** NOW, ARE YOU SURE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU **WANT?**

OF COURSE I'M SURE, **RON,** DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? THE ARTWORK MUST REFLECT THE MAJESTY OF MY STORYLINE. THE SCOPE. THE **GRANDEUR!**

UM... JOHN, DO YOU HAVE TIME TO **FIX** THIS COVER YOU DREW?

"FIX?" **FIX?** DID SOMEONE SAY "FIX" IN MY PRESENCE?

UM--ER--LOOK, I KNOW I COULD LOSE MY JOB FOR EVEN **MENTIONING** IT, BUT...

SUDDENLY...

AWRIGHT!

WHO'S FIRST TA GET THEIR HEADS BROKE?

THE THING!

WELL, IT AIN'T JIM SHOOTER, KIDDIES, NOW I WANNA KNOW WHICH ONE OF YOU BOZOS IS RESPONSIBLE FER THIS LIBEL!

L-L-LIBEL? WH-WH-WHAT LIBEL, BEN?

THAT'S MISTER GRIMM TA YOU, FOUR-EYES, AN' YOU KNOW DANG WELL WHAT LIBEL!

ER... AH... AM I TO CONSTRUE FROM THIS THAT YOU ARE IN SOME WAY DISPLEASED WITH THE CURRENT ISSUE?

YOU CAN BET YER MAPLE LEAF COLLECTION ON THAT, PAL!

"SURE, I WENT UP AGAINST THAT GOODY TWO-SHOES CLOWN LAST MONTH. AN', SURE, HE'D JUST TRIED TA ROB A BANK. THAT MUCH YA GOT RIGHT.

"BUT WHEN HE TRIED TA USE THEM FUNKY BOOTS ON ME...

WELL, IT WUZ JUST NO CONTEST,"

RLINK!

YA COULDA DONE THE WHOLE "FIGHT" IN ABOUT TWO PANELS, BUT WHAT DO YA DO?

PAGE AFTER PAGE OF ME FIGHTIN' THIS CLOWN...

...AN' ALMOST LOSIN'!

HEY, CALM DOWN, B--MR. GRIMM. WE HAD TO DO SOMETHING WITH THE STORY TO MAKE IT MORE... MORE SUITABLE TO YOUR PUBLIC IMAGE.

HEY! THAT'S MY CHA-- UMPH!

JOHN! SHUD-DUP! RON'S GOT HIM QUIETED DOWN! DON'T BLOW IT!

SEE, IF I'D DRAWN THAT REGULAR SIZED GUY THAT GOODY REALLY WAS, IT WOULDA LOOKED MEAN FOR YOU TO BE BEATING ON HIM!

R-RIGHT! SOMETIMES WE HAVE TO **EMBROIDER** A BIT--'CAUSE NOT EVERY-THING THAT HAPPENS TO YOU IS THE KIND OF **COSMIC GRANDEUR** TYPE STORY YOUR FANS EXPECT...

WE **DO** HAVE A MONTHLY MAGAZINE TO PRODUCE...

...AND SOMETIMES YOUR LIFE JUST ISN'T **INTEREST-ING.**

...NOT INTER-ESTING...

NOT INTERESTING?!

WELL, JUST YOU HANG AROUND A MINUTE...

AN' MAYBE I CAN LIVEN THINGS UP A BIT...

...JUST LET ME CLOSE THESE DOORS SO WE CAN GET A LITTLE PRIVACY.

KA-RUNCH! JOHN BYRNE CRRASSH!

BRADABOOM! CLANG! GRUNCH! TINKLE TINKLE

MEANWHILE, UNAWARE OF WHAT IS OCCURRING MERE YARDS AWAY...

OKAY, I MANAGED TO GET ALL THOSE **AVENGERS** PAGES SCRIPTED*. I WONDER IF **ANN** STILL WANTS THAT **CAPTAIN AMERICA** STORY FOR **FANFARE?**

*SEE **MARVEL FANFARE #12** - ANN

VIRGINIA SAYS SHE'S IN BYRNE'S OFF... EEK!

I KNOW YOU, YOU'RE THAT **ROGER STERN** GUY. YOU AIN'T NEVER WROTE ME...

...SO I GOT NO BEEF WITH YOU, RIGHT?

N-N-N-N-N-NO S-S-S-SIR!

L-LUCKY HE DOESN'T REMEMBER THAT **CHRISTMAS TREASURY!**

WELL, IF YER LOOKIN' FER **NOCENTI,** OR **WILSON,** OR **BYRNE...** I WOULDN'T GO IN THERE IF I WUZ YOU...

...IT'S KINDA... **INTERESTIN.'**

?

The Marvel Fumetti Book #1 (April 1984)

QUICK DRAW

STARRING: JOHN BYRNE

HI THERE, JOHN-- ALPHA FLIGHT/ FANTASTIC FOUR/ THING--BYRNE, HERE...
...AND OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS I'VE DEVELOPED A REPUTATION AS ONE OF THE FASTEST ARTISTS IN COMICS.
NOW, I DON'T DENY THAT I'M FAST...
...I'VE JUST BEGUN TO QUESTION THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING *THAT* FAST.
UH-OH!
SEE? THE FRICTION ALONE CAUSES ME TO REDRAW 35% OF MY PAGES.

STORY: MIKE CARLIN **PHOTOS: VINCE COLLETTA** **SPECIAL EFFECTS: ARTHUR ADAMS**

THE UP ELEVATOR

STARRING: JOHN BYRNE, TOM PALMER, MIKE CARLIN and MARK GRUENWALD

HI, JOHN... HEY! WAIT, YOU DON'T WANNA GO--
SPIT IT OUT, CARLIN--- I HAVEN'T GOT ALL DAY.
JOHN, THIS ELEVATOR'S BUSTED OR SOMETHING.
YEAH... SOMETHING NEGATIVE!

STORY: MIKE CARLIN PHOTOS: VINCE COLLETTA SPECIAL EFFECTS: BILL SIENKIEWICZ

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

STARRING: THE HULK, MARY MCPHERRAN, JOHN BYRNE, RON WILSON, LOUISE JONES and ANN NOCENTI

STORY: MIKE CARLIN PHOTOS: VINCE COLLETTA

THE DOWN ELEVATOR

STARRING:
DANNY FINGEROTH,
WALTER SIMONSON,
PAUL SMITH, BRET BLEVINS
and JOHN BYRNE

THE ELEVATOR SERVICE STILL TERRIBLE, WALT?
YEAH, PAUL! BRET AND I HAVE BEEN WAITING HERE FOR TEN MINUTES!
WHY DOESN'T SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING?

OH, HI, JOHN! JUST TURN IN YOUR FANTASTIC FOUR PAGES?
YEAH, DANNY! AND I'M HURRYING HOME NOW TO A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP!
DON'T COUNT ON HURRYING JOHN!

STORY: JOE ALBELO **PHOTOS: VINCE COLLETTA**

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15 JULY

MARVEL FANFARE™

To Johnny
From Ya Best Pal
Benjamin—

EDITORI-AL

HI! C'MON IN!

SINCE I NO LONGER WORK AT MARVEL FULL TIME, MY OLD BUDDY, CARL POTTS, HAS BEEN KIND ENOUGH TO LET ME USE HIS OFFICE AS MY FANFARE BASE. SAY HELLO, CARL.

WISH I HAD THE TIME, AL.

HEH! EDITING IS SUCH A HECTIC BUSINESS.

MY FORMER ASSISTANT, ANN NOCENTI, HAS BEEN PROMOTED TO FULL EDITOR (CONGRATS, ANN.) SO CARL'S NEW ASSISTANT, JIM MASSARA, HAS VOLUNTEERED TO TAKE HER PLACE AS THE FANFARE LIASON.

HI, COMICS FANS.

DON'T GET PUSHY, KID.

NOW, LET'S SEE-- OH, YEAH! A WORD OF EXPLANATION ABOUT *LAST* ISSUE'S FEATURES.

IN THE HOLIDAY RUSH I NEGLECTED TO PUT DISCLAIMERS ON THE JOBS EXPLAINING THAT THEY WEREN'T QUITE IN SYNCH WITH CURRENT STORYLINES.

OBVIOUSLY, THE FANTASTIC FOUR APPEARED IN THEIR OLD COSTUMES, SO *THAT* STORY TOOK PLACE A WHILE AGO.

AND THE QUICKSILVER STORY TOOK PLACE SOME TIME BEFORE ATTILAN WAS TRANSPORTED TO THE MOON.

BOB BUDIANSKY, JOHN BYRNE, AND CONTINUITY FREAKS EVERYWHERE-- PLEASE *FORGIVE* ME!

NOW, ON TO *THIS* ISSUE.

OUR BACK-UP FEATURE IS WRITTEN BY ROGER McKENZIE, DAREDEVIL WRITER, PAR EXCELLENCE.

THE ART IS AN INTERESTING COMBINATION OF PENCILS BY "OLD PRO," JACK SPARLING, AS INKED BY "YOUNG UPSTARTS" AKIN & GARVEY. I RATHER LIKED THE BLEND, HOPE YOU DO, TOO.

BUT THE *REALLY* BIG NEWS IS OUR LEAD FEATURE. IT'S WRITTEN, PENCILLED INKED AND COLORED BY NONE OTHER THAN BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH.

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO'VE BEEN COMPLAINING THAT ALL THE FANFARE STORIES ARE OLD, OUT-OF-CONTINUITY INVENTORY MATERIAL, I HAVE JUST THIS TO SAY:

NYAH NYAH!!

that night...

PACER

DIE CAST

GIANT WHEELS

THE BI ONES

ALL AGES

GODWOTA GLUE

50 HAND MADE CIGARS

PRIMA

R-RRINNG!
KUNCH!

....

... gplmn...

SPECIAL OFFER

SPECIAL OFFER

KICK ME!

npm ... NPOL

NOM ....
GDAP PHAW!
CHUH! CHOH!
DAT FEH...
KICK ME!
GUHH?
FRAMN WTCHMCLLM STKTMA FUUT!
TUG
FRMN...
RIPP
RAPP
KICK ME!
FRAMIN...
WURDLE WURDLE
KA-
BOOM

GRFM-- NINEY- PERSEND FEWA- CAVITIZ--

KICK ME!

--THENNA DEHBEFOH.

MNM

SPISHSPISH-AH-- MNM--

SPLASH

SKITK

MNA!

WHAH!?

I GOT STUBBLE!

I GOT WHISKERS!

BUT I AIN'T HADDA *BEARD* SINCE I BECAME *THE THING!*

WHATTA REVOLTIN' DEVELOPMENT!

I GOTTA TELL *REED*--

--MEBBE I'M *REVERTERATIN'* OR SOMP'N!

WAIT A MINUTE! THESE AIN'T WHISKERS--

--THEY'RE BITZA *BLAMED DRINKIN' STRAW!*

THIS SMELLSA SOMETHIN' BEGINNIN' WITH *FLAME-ON!*

HEY, TORCH!

CUTE TRICK, PAL!

OKAY KID, I FELL FOR THE GAG--

NOT IN HIS ROOM--

HUH--MUST BE HIDIN'.

COME ON OUT, SQUIRT! I CAN TAKE A JOKE!

I AIN'T MADATCHA!

YEESH! WILLYA LOOKIT THAT!

NOW I'M *GETTIN'* MADATCHA.

I CAN'T BELIEVE JOHNNY WOULD DO SOMETHIN' SO *MICKEYMOUSE!*

LESSEE IF I CAN FAKE TH' KID OUT...

CLATA RATA ATA

OUCH!

THUMP

BASH

OW!

NOT A *PEEP* FROM TH' *PUNK!*

HMPH!

BUT WHAT'S WITH THE AMBUSH, *ANYHOW?*

WHUTZE GOT IT INFER*ME* FER?

MEBBE HE'S JUST GONE *LOONEYTOONS* OR SOMETHIN!

ALL THAT STERNO INNIZ DIET--

THAT'LL *DO IT* TO *ANYBODY.*

OH BOY! PANCAKES! MUST BE JOHNNY'S BREAKFAST!

AN' HE'S TREMBLIN' UNNERA ROCK SOME-WHERE'S--SO--

--MEBBE I'LL JUST HAVE A *LI-I-I-I-ITTLE TASTE!*

HOPE HE'S GONE *EASY* ON TH' TABASCO...

BLUEBERRIES!

YUM!

YUM YUM

GUESS I'LL JUST *EAT 'EM UP--*

--IT'LL SERVE TORCHIE *RIGHT* FER MESSIN' WIT MA *FACE.*

HEH...CUTE GAG, REALLY.

BUT TH' ROLLER-SKATES WERE *DEFINITELY* DUMB.

DINK

UH-OH!

SPLUNG!

YEOW!

OKAY TORCHIE!--

YAH GONE TOO FAR!

I CAN TAKE SKATES STUCK TO MAH CHIN AN' STRAWS AT TH' TOPPA TH' STAIRS!

BUT SPRING-LOADIN' YER BREAKFAST?!--

THAT AIN'T KOSHER, SONNY!

NOW THA BLUE-EYED THING IS MAD!!

COME OUTTA HIDIN' YA PUNK! SO YA CAN TAKE YER WHOMPIN' LIKE A MAN!

WHUZZIS?

"KICK ME"...

=choke=

AN' THIS FROM TH' KID I PULLED FROM TH' WRECKAGE OF A MISSPENT YOUTH--

--JOHNNY BOY--

--YA GROWED UP A BUM!

AH-

WOOOSH

-HAH!

OUTTA HIDIN', EH?

BIG MISTAKE, BUDDY!

CUZ--

IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!!

WUH!-

-WUZZAT?!

US ARMY

YIPE!

AYAYAAAAA

AAAAAA

YOWA-YOW

UP AHEAD! NO! NO! IT CAN'T BE!

DOOM!

BUT IT CAN'T BE YOU DOIN' THIS!

YOU AIN'T EVEN GOT A SENSE A' HUMOR!

LET ALONE THIS MANY TOY TRUCKS!

SOME KINDA *GIANT* *POSTER* STRETCHED ACROSS TH' HALL!

YOMP!

I GOTTA *HAND* IT TO THAT KID!--THIS'S A *HECKUVA* *PRODUCTION!*

SO I MIGHT AS WELL PLAY ALONG!

BUT WHUZZIT ALL *ABOUT!?* *WAIT--*

THE SUPER SKRULL!

I CAN TAKE IT!

I'M LAFFIN' ATCHA KID-- *LAFFIN'!*

LISTEN...

HAHA

WHUMP!!

HAHAHAHA

...I CAN TAKE *ANYTHIN'* YA THROW AT ME!

I CAN...

GAAAH!

Hi boys 'n' girls!

THAT I CAN'T TAKE!

I GIVE UP, KID!

BAM!

I GIVE--

U-U-up!

BEN!

HEY BENJY!

YOU KNOW WHAT DAY IT IS??

PLUNK

APRIL FOOL!!

FAAAAAAARRRP

4

WHA-AH?!

POP

BANG!

BANG!

POP

BANG!

POP

BAM

POP

BANG!

POP

POP

PPPPPPPPPPP

YOU MEAN TO TELL ME THAT--

POP

POP

BANG!

--THAT YOU SET THIS WHOLE BLASTED SCHTICK UP JUST FER APRIL FOOLS DAY?!

PRETTY GOOD, HUH?

APRIL FO-O-OL!

SOMP'NS WRONG HERE!

THIRTY DAYS HAS SEPTEMBER... APRIL JUNE ...uh...and november

BUT IT AIN'T EVEN APRIL FIRST! YA BLAMED IDJIT!

ITZA DAY BEFORE!

ARE YOU KIDDING?!

OP

G!

RAN

LOOKIT!

THIRTY DAYS HAS SEPTEMBER--

--UH APRILJUNE--

--AND... uh...

...november...

FAARP

ALL THA REST HAVE THIRTY-ONE.!!

WHOOPSIE.

WELL...

HECK!

FORGET ABOUT IT, THEN.

THAT KID LOVES ME REALLY.

I KNOW IT.

4

FIN

that night...

YA BROUGHT THIS ON YERSELF, KIDDO.

NAMELY THE ENTIRE PLUMBIN' SYSTEM OF TH' TOP FIVE FLOORS OF TH' BAXTER BUILDIN'.

AN' OPEN THIS GRILL INTA YER ROOM...

THEN WIT' STEALTH BELYIN' MY ASTONISHING BULK...

ATTACH THIS SOUND WAVE ACTIVATOR TO TH' SPRINKLER SYSTEM.

CLIK

SSHHH!

ALL I GOTTA DO IS GET THESE WATER PIPES CLAMPED INTA PLACE...

NOW TA BEAT A TIPPYTOE RETREAT.

IF JOHNNY SO MUCH AS *YAWNS* WHEN HE WAKES UP HE'LL SET OFF TH' SOUND WAVE DOOHICKEY I SWIPED FROM REED--

--THEN SPLOSHO!

APRIL FOOL, HOTSHOT!

H'YOK H'YOK =snorf=

NOW ALL I GOTTA DO IS RELAX...

...HAVE A CIGAR...

CLICK

...SIT BACK, AN' WAIT FOR TH' FIREWORKS TO BEGIN!

THE END

PRODUCED BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH • LETTERED BY JIM NOVAK • ALLEN MILGROM, EDITOR • JIM SHOOTER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF.

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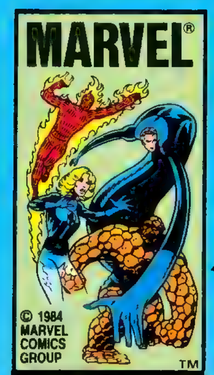

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4 1 MAY

SPECIAL EDITION

Fantastic Four®

SUB-MARINER VS. THE HUMAN RACE!
REPRESENTING THE CLASSIC TALE BY STAN LEE and JACK KIRBY

PLUS! ADDITIONAL ART AND STORY BY JOHN BYRNE!

"PUZZLED BY THE SEVERITY OF WHAT THEY FIRST THOUGHT TO BE A NATURAL EXPLOSION, THE ATLANTEANS INVESTIGATED. EVEN THE NOBLE KING WENT FORTH TO VIEW THE SCENE OF DESTRUCTION.

"AND THERE DISCOVERED EVIDENCE THAT THE BLAST HAD NOT BEEN NATURAL, BUT MAN-MADE."

WE HAVE LONG SUSPECTED THE SURFACE-DWELLERS WERE EVOLVING ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY. NOW IT SEEMS THEY ARE ATTACKING US.

"GREATLY DISTURBED BY THIS APPARENT THREAT, THE KING SUMMONED HIS DAUGHTER, THE LADY FEN."

MY DEAR, I WISH TO SEND A SCOUTING EXPEDITION TO INVESTIGATE THAT STRANGE EXPLOSION.

AS YOU COMMAND, FATHER.

"BUT FEN WAS YOUNG AND ADVENTUROUS, AND HER FEMALE CURIOSITY WAS PIQUED. SHE DID NOT ORGANIZE AN EXPLORATORY PARTY, BUT CHOSE INSTEAD TO GO TO THE SURFACE HERSELF.

"THERE SHE FOUND A VESSEL MOST ALIEN IN NATURE TO ONE OF HER RACE."

I MUST LEARN WHAT MANNER OF CREATURE INHABITS SO STRANGE A CRAFT.

"THE SHIP WAS ALMOST AN OBSCENITY TO HER, DESIGNED AS IT WAS TO KEEP *OUT* THE LIFE-GIVING WATERS, BUT FEN COULD NOT RESIST ITS STRANGE, SIREN CALL...

"AND SO WAS CAPTURED BY ONE OF THE CREWMEN."

OH!

"QUICKLY THE CAPTAIN WAS SUMMONED TO SEE THIS STRANGEST OF STRANGE PRISONERS."

A PRISONER, JENKINS! WHAT KIND OF PRISONER?

I THINK YOU'D BETTER SEE FOR YOURSELF, CAP'N SIR.

"AND SO, A FEW MINUTES LATER, A MOST SIGNIFICANT MEETING TOOK PLACE. PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT MEETING IN THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF THE TWO RACES."

IT DON'T MAKE SENSE, CAPTAIN! SHE OUGHT TO BE FROZEN SOLID IN THAT GETUP, BUT SHE AIN'T! AND LOOK AT THE COLOR OF HER SKIN! AND NO ONE CAN SAVVY THAT *LINGO* SHE TALKS!

STRANGE... SHE SEEMS TO BE HAVING DIFFICULTY BREATHING! SHE KEEPS LOOKING AT THE WATER, AS THOUGH SHE WANTS TO RETURN TO IT!

"WE CAN ONLY GUESS WHAT JUMP OF LOGIC IT WAS THAT TOLD CAPTAIN McKENZIE THAT THE BEAUTIFUL STRANGER NEEDED TO RETURN TO THE SEA... BUT IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, AS HE AND FEN SLOWLY LEARNED PIECES OF EACH OTHERS' LANGUAGES, HE ALLOWED HER OFTEN TO RETURN TO THE FREEZING WATERS."

SHE'S SO LOVELY, SO GENTLE, SO FRAGILE!

"AND, EVEN MORE STRANGELY, PERHAPS, ALTHOUGH SHE COULD EASILY HAVE ESCAPED, LADY FEN DID NOT IMMEDIATELY RETURN TO HER UNDERSEA KINGDOM, FOR MORE THAN HER BODY HAD BEEN MADE PRISONER. WITHOUT KNOWING, CAPTAIN McKENZIE HAD ALSO CAPTURED HER HEART."

I SHOULD RETURN TO THE DEEPS! BUT I CANNOT! I CANNOT LEAVE HIM!

"THEN, ONE INEVITABLE DAY..."

FEN, MY LOVELY STRANGER, MY MYSTERIOUS ENCHANTRESS, I MUST ASK YOU...

I KNOW YOUR QUESTION, BELOVED! AND MY HEART SAYS..."*YES!*"

"AND SO THE TWO RACES, SEPARATED FOR COUNTLESS AGES, WERE UNITED ONCE MORE, BY THE SIMPLE, UNIVERSAL CEREMONY OF-- MARRIAGE!"

"BUT, WEEKS LATER..."

WHERE IS FEN?

WHERE IS MY DAUGHTER? THOSE SURFACE-DWELLING DEVILS HAVE *TAKEN* HER!

" AND SO, WITHIN THE HOUR, A SECOND CONTACT WAS MADE BETWEEN *HOMO MERMANUS* AND *HOMO SAPIENS*. BUT THIS TIME THE PARTY THAT BOARDED THE *ORACLE* BROUGHT WITH IT THE WEAPONS OF *WAR!*

" IN THE TERRIBLE BATTLE THAT ENSUED, LEONARD McKENZIE FELL AS ONE STRUCK DEAD...

"AND POOR, POOR PRINCESS FEN HAD NO TIME TO GRIEVE FOR HER LOST LOVE BEFORE SHE WAS TAKEN BENEATH THE WATERS. *

*AT THIS TIME IT WAS NOT KNOWN THAT NAMOR'S FATHER HAD SURVIVED THE ATTACK!

"MONTHS LATER HER GRIEF WAS MADE GREATER BY WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN A JOYOUS EVENT, THE BIRTH OF HER ONLY SON, THE SON OF LEONARD McKENZIE.

" A NEW BREED OF UNDERSEA MAN, ABLE TO EASILY BREATHE BOTH AIR AND WATER, THIS WAS *PRINCE NAMOR*, THE *SUB-MARINER*, POSSIBLY THE FIRST KNOWN *MUTANT* OF OUR TIME, NOBLE, POWERFUL, DEDICATED--THE ONLY TRUE HUMAN AMPHIBIAN ON EARTH!

"ALTHOUGH HE HAD LITTLE LOVE FOR HIS FATHER'S RACE, DURING THE TERRIBLE YEARS OF WORLD WAR TWO, NAMOR FOUGHT SIDE BY SIDE WITH *CAPTAIN AMERICA*, AND THE ANDROID WARRIOR WHO WAS THE ORIGINAL *HUMAN TORCH*.

"TOGETHER THEY CARVED A SWATH THROUGH THE NAZI HORDE, AS THE *INVADERS!*

"THEN, IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS CENTURY, THE NEARLY IMMORTAL NAMOR SUDDENLY VANISHED, HIS WHEREABOUTS A MYSTERY FOR MANY DECADES...

"UNTIL, JUST RECENTLY, THE MODERN-DAY *HUMAN TORCH* FOUND A LONELY AMNESIAC DERELICT IN A FLOPHOUSE ON THE *BOWERY*...

"AND, USING HIS FLAMING POWER TO STRIP AWAY THE STRANGER'S LONG HAIR AND BEARD...

"DISCOVERED WHERE THE MIGHTY SUB-MARINER HAD BEEN THROUGH THE LONG YEARS,"

HOLY COW! IT'S HIM! IT'S *PRINCE NAMOR!*

THE FANTASTIC FOUR PIN-UP PAGE!

REED RICHARDS

MISTER FANTASTIC

THE FANTASTIC FOUR PIN-UP PAGE!

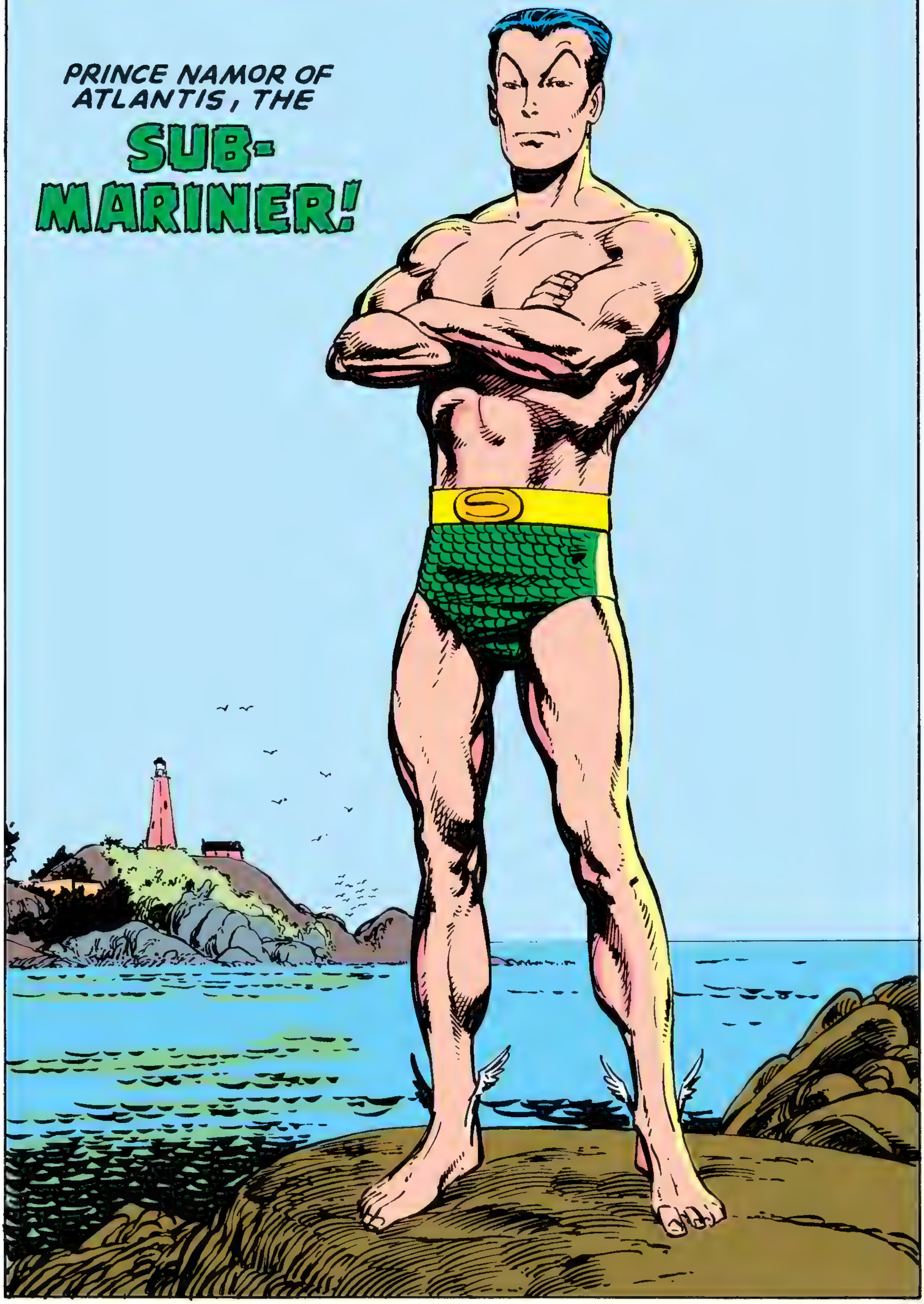
THE FANTASTIC FOUR PIN-UP PAGE!

THE FANTASTIC FOUR PIN-UP PAGE!

THE FANTASTIC FOUR PIN-UP PAGE!

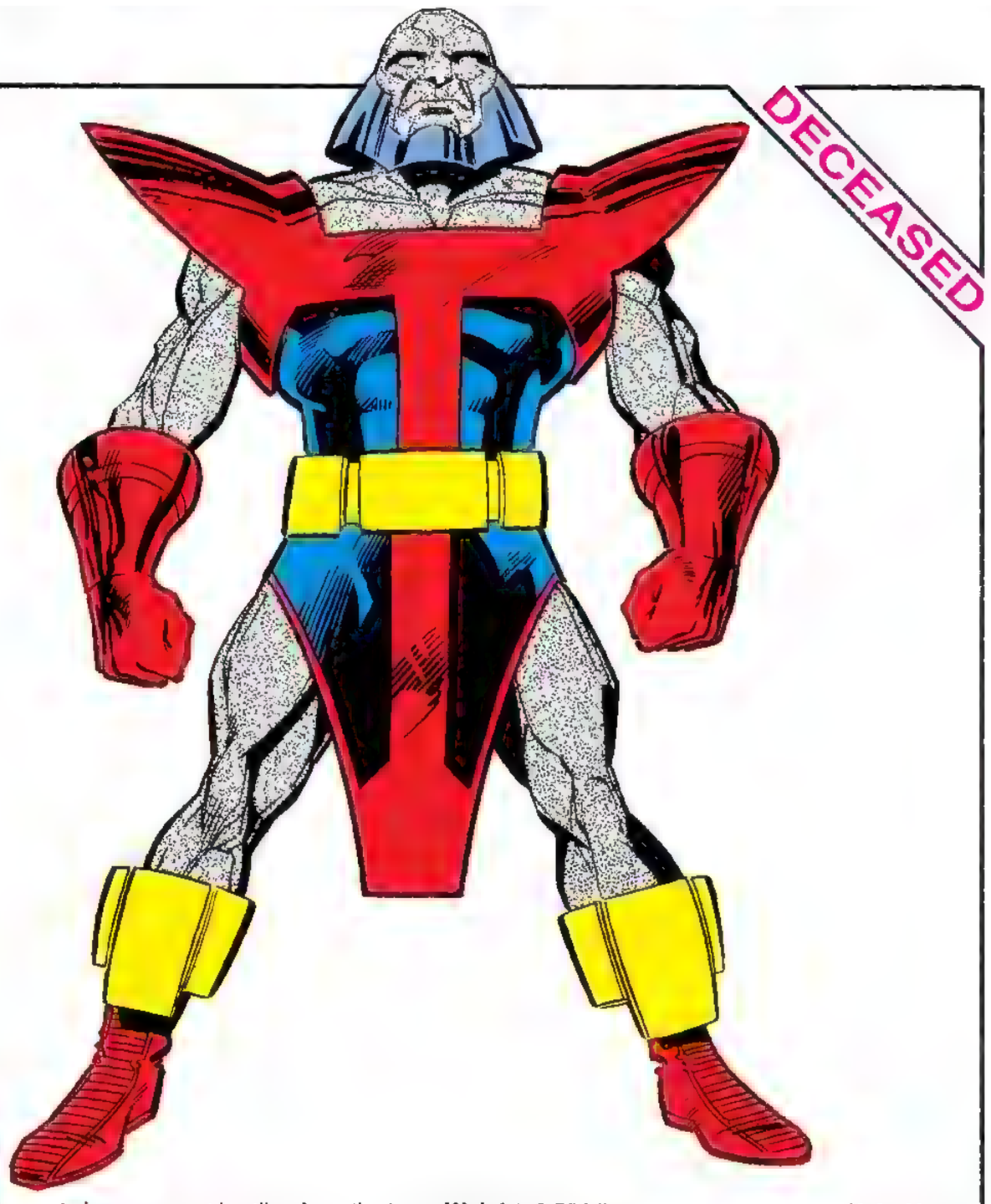
PRINCE NAMOR OF ATLANTIS, THE

SUB-MARINER!



The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe (1983-84) Terrax entry
Character bio by Mark Gruenwald | Art by John Byrne & Josef Rubinstein

TERRAX



Real Name: Tyros
Occupation: Former dictator, former herald of Galactus
Identity: Unknown to the general public of Earth
Legal status: Citizen of Lanlak
Place of birth: City of Lanlak, planet Birj
Place of death: Queens, New York
Former aliases: Terrax the Tamer
First appearance: FANTASTIC FOUR #211
Final appearance: FANTASTIC FOUR #260
History: Tyros was originally the dictator of the small city-state Lanlak on the world of Birj (sometimes translated as Terran), a moon of the gas giant Marman in a solar system eighty thousand light years from earth. Tyros ruled through the use of force, his limited power over earth and rock. This power, which apparently was a mutation unique to Tyros, enabled him to animate constructs of stone which would patrol his kingdom maintaining his firm control. Tyros loved power and conquest, and led a life of debauchery and violence. Somehow, he came to the attention of Galactus, the world-devourer (see *Galactus*). Galactus had been seeking a new herald to guide him to fertile planets which he needed for sustenance. The space being surmised that the common fault in most of his former heralds was that their moral values prevented them from fulfilling their duties. For a new herald, Galactus sought an individual who would have no compunction in finding worlds for Galactus to render lifeless.

When the Fantastic Four came to Galactus to ask him for aid in their battle against the Sphinx (see *Sphinx*), Galactus agreed, but only with the condition that the Fantastic Four would journey to Birj and subdue Tyros for him. The Fantastic Four reluctantly did this, and in doing so, they freed the city of Lanlak from Tyros' rule. Brought before Galactus, Tyros was exposed to Galactus' cosmic power, and was transformed into Terrax the Tamer. His minor control over stone was augmented to an uncalculable degree. Now, he could affect all matter of rock and stone on nearly a planetary scale. His body was changed so that it would withstand the vacuum of space. Finally, Galactus gave Terrax a weapon called the cosmic axe, capable of generating waves of cosmic force.

As Galactus' new herald, Terrax found more worlds for his master than any of the previous heralds. Terrax likened the discovery of new planets to the feeling of conquest. On several occasions, Terrax annihilated large segments of the population himself using his cosmic powers. As Galactus had hoped, Terrax's lack of morality made him a successful herald. But whereas Galactus' other heralds had a sense of loyalty to their master, Terrax had none. Indeed, he served Galactus out of fear for his master's power, but even conquered that fear on several occasions to defy Galactus' wishes. Shortly after being transformed into Galactus' herald, Terrax fled from his master and overthrew the ruling body of a small unnamed planet. He enslaved the entire population and set himself up as the planet's deity. Huge segments of that world's people died erecting temples and cities to glorify Terrax. Terrax planned to use the survivors of his reign as the first wave of a planned universe-conquering army. But before Terrax could proceed any further, Galactus summoned his herald. Fearful of his master's wrath, Terrax hid in a black hole. Utilizing the powers of the Earth mutant Dazzler, Galactus freed Terrax and made him obedient to his will again.

But Terrax's rebellious nature could not be totally stifled, and after a while, Terrax again fled his master. This time, he went to Earth. Utilizing his power, Terrax levitated the entire island of Manhattan into earth orbit and used the lives of its millions of inhabitants to bargain with the Fantastic Four. To spare Manhattan, Terrax demanded that they destroy Galactus by attacking his ship. Galactus had by now realized that his herald had become a liability to him. Returning Manhattan to Earth, Galactus stripped Terrax of his cosmic power and the transformed alien was sent hurtling from the top of the World Trade Center down to the street below. Although seriously injured, Terrax's alien physique enabled him to survive the fall. Unknown to both the Fantastic Four and the Avengers, who were present at the site, Terrax's broken form was taken to a nearby hospital by an unidentified passerby. He remained there for several months in a semi-comatose state.

Victor von Doom, looking for a pawn to use in a plot against the Fantastic Four, discovered the fact of Terrax's survival (see *Doctor Doom*). Terrax was kidnapped from the hospital and brought back to Latveria by a squad of robots dispatched by Doom. There, after six weeks of Doom s advanced treatments, Terrax recovered. But, having been stripped of cosmic power, Terrax had no memories of having been the herald of Galactus, and thus called himself Tyros once more. Doom had recently perfected a device that was capable of endowing an individual with limited cosmic power. Tyros readily agreed to be exposed to the device's energies, as he wished revenge against the Fantastic Four. Garbed in a special suit that would channel and regulate the cosmic energies in his body, Tyros set off for New York. Unknown to him, the power Doom gave him would consume Tyros's body within a matter of hours. Thus, Doom would not be faced with an adversary whose power was vaster than his own, once Tyros had served his purpose.

Tyros defeated the Fantastic Four and, detesting the fact he was in the service of any master, he turned on Doom and immobilized the Latverian monarch in his armor. At Tyros's moment of seeming triumph, the Silver Surfer, the first of Galactus's heralds, arrived to save the lives of his friends, the Fantastic Four. Tyros believed that his power level was equal to that of the Surfer's but Tyros was no match for someone who had received cosmic power from Galactus himself. Because of this, Tyros was forced to use his powers to the limit in order to combat the Surfer. This only served to hasten his inevitable deterioration. As the two former heralds of Galactus engaged in battle, Tyros was totally consumed by the "power cosmic."

Height: 6' 6" **Eyes:** Grey **Hair:** None
Weight: 2,750 lbs.
Powers: Terrax possessed vast cosmic power granted him by Galactus. Terrax's body was coated with a flexible rock-like shell that was impervious to extremes of heat and cold, from 50 degrees above absolute zero to the interior of a small sun, pressure up to 100 Earth atmospheres, and concussive force up to a fall at terminal velocity from the limit of Earth's exosphere. His body had been sustained by cosmic energy, making it unnecessary for him to eat or breathe. Terrax's strength had been augmented by Galactus to enable him to lift (press) 75 tons without supplementing it in any way by additional cosmic energy.

Terrax's mutant ability to psionically manipulate the molecules of rock and earth was augmented by Galactus' transformation at least a hundredfold. Terrax could move planetary masses up to 100 miles in diameter. He could move asteroids of 10 miles in diameter at speeds of up to thousands of miles per hour. He could control the direction of a swarm of meteors within 100 miles of his person. With concentration, he could affect a small piece of matter 1000 miles away from him. The farther the distance, however, the less mass he was able to affect. Standing on a planetary surface, he could affect tectonic plates sufficiently to cause earthquakes and create chasms in the surface thousands of feet deep or wide. Deploying his powers to the maximum extent, he could separate a landmass the size of Manhattan Island and levitate it miles off the Earth's surface. On worlds with lesser gravities, he could lift even greater masses.

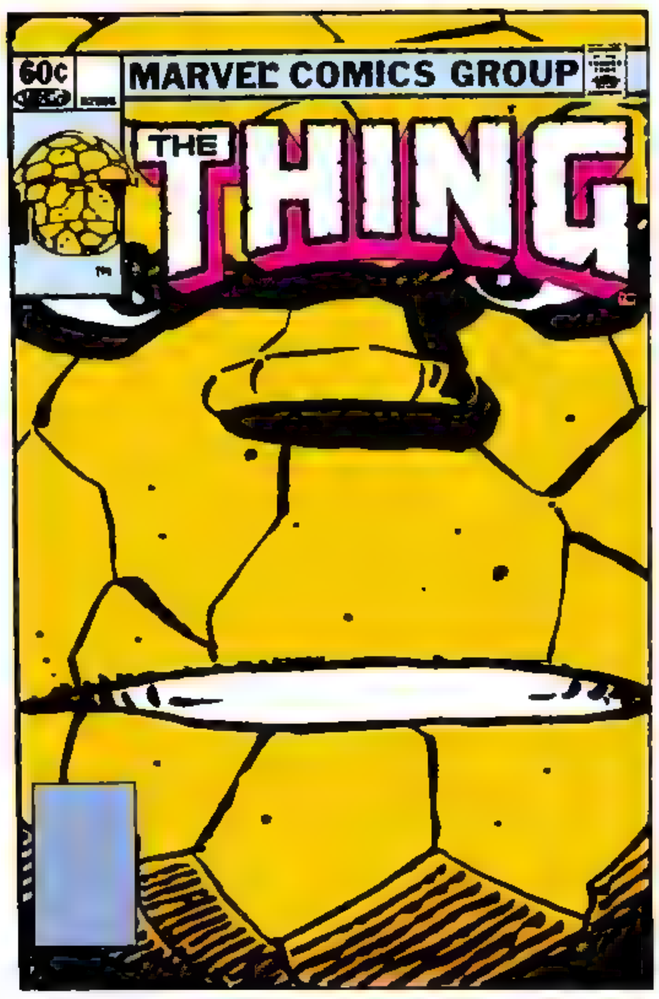
Terrax, like all of Galactus' heralds, was able to enter warp-space and negotiate it through it in order to cover great spatial distances. Traversing through the normal universe, he was able to attain .75 the speed of light.

Paraphernalia: Terrax wielded a cosmic axe which had several powers of its own. It was capable of emanating waves of destructive force sufficiently powerful to rent a tear in Galactus' own ship. It could also project highly impervious force shields. Since it operated independently of rock and earth, the axe augmented the scope of Terrax's power.

This September 1983 house ad boasts the roomier benefits of Marvel's new cover trade dress, the first trade dress change since November 1971 titles.

MARVEL'S NEW COVER FORMAT LEAVES MORE ROOM FOR THE ART!

BEFORE



AFTER

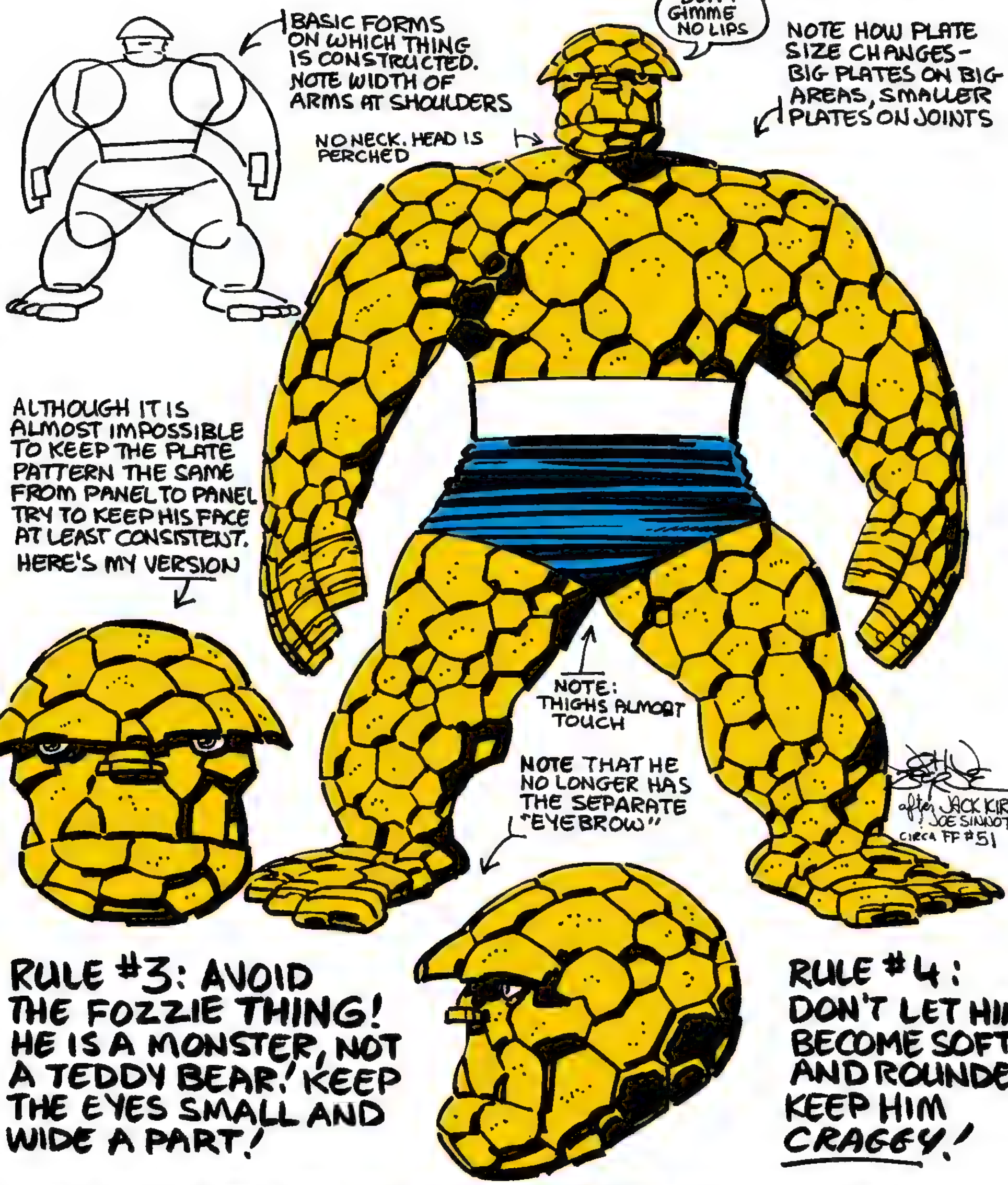
IT'S MORE MARVEL MAGIC!

"How to Draw the Thing!" appeared as a backup feature in *The Thing* #5 (November 1983). Note that Byrne cites Kirby & Sinnott's Thing circa *FF* #51 as a paradigm.

HOW TO DRAW THE THING!™

RULE #1: DO NOT ATTEMPT TO APPLY BASIC RULES OF HUMAN ANATOMY TO THE THING. HE IS NOT BUILT LIKE A HUMAN BEING!

RULE #2: KEEP THE ROCKY PLATES ROUGH AND UNEVEN. DO NOT GO FOR UNIFORMITY OF SIZE OR SHAPE!


BASIC FORMS ON WHICH THING IS CONSTRUCTED. NOTE WIDTH OF ARMS AT SHOULDERS
DON'T GIMME NO LIPS
NOTE HOW PLATE SIZE CHANGES - BIG PLATES ON BIG AREAS, SMALLER PLATES ON JOINTS
NO NECK. HEAD IS PERCHED
ALTHOUGH IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO KEEP THE PLATE PATTERN THE SAME FROM PANEL TO PANEL TRY TO KEEP HIS FACE AT LEAST CONSISTENT. HERE'S MY VERSION
NOTE: THIGHS ALMOST TOUCH
NOTE THAT HE NO LONGER HAS THE SEPARATE "EYEBROW"
after JACK KIRBY & JOE SINNOTT CIRCA FF #51

RULE #3: AVOID THE FOZZIE THING! HE IS A MONSTER, NOT A TEDDY BEAR! KEEP THE EYES SMALL AND WIDE A PART!

RULE #4: DON'T LET HIM BECOME SOFT AND ROUNDED! KEEP HIM CRAGGY!

WHEN CONSIDERING THE LIGHT SOURCE REMEMBER THAT SOME OF THE PLATES ARE HIGHER THAN OTHERS, CREATING CRATER-LIKE SHADOWS

FF #263's letters page featured a preview of reader submissions for the "Sue Coiffure Contest," as rendered by Byrne. The winning hairstyle was revealed in issue #271.

Fantastic Four Fan Page

% MARVEL COMICS GROUP
387 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10016

BOB BUDIANSKY
EDITOR
MICHAEL HIGGINS
ASSISTANT EDITOR

We were hoping Sue's Coiffure Contest might generate a little interest among our readers, but we had no idea just *how* much! At the point of this writing the official close of the contest is still a couple of months away, yet we have already received a grand total of 538 individual entries! 538 potential new styles for Sue.

Well, not quite that many different *styles*, actually. A lot of you suggested the same styles, and a lot automatically disqualified yourselves by suggesting either (a) the hairstyle she's presently wearing or (b) the style she had before issue #232. The whole idea of this contest was to pick a NEW style, remember, not to comment on what she's worn in the past.

In any case, a winner is yet to be picked (obviously, since the contest hasn't closed yet) but we thought we'd take a moment here to list the names of those of you who sent in such wonderful drawings that, even though the styles themselves haven't won, we felt we couldn't let your work pass without an HONORABLE MENTION:

In no particular order:

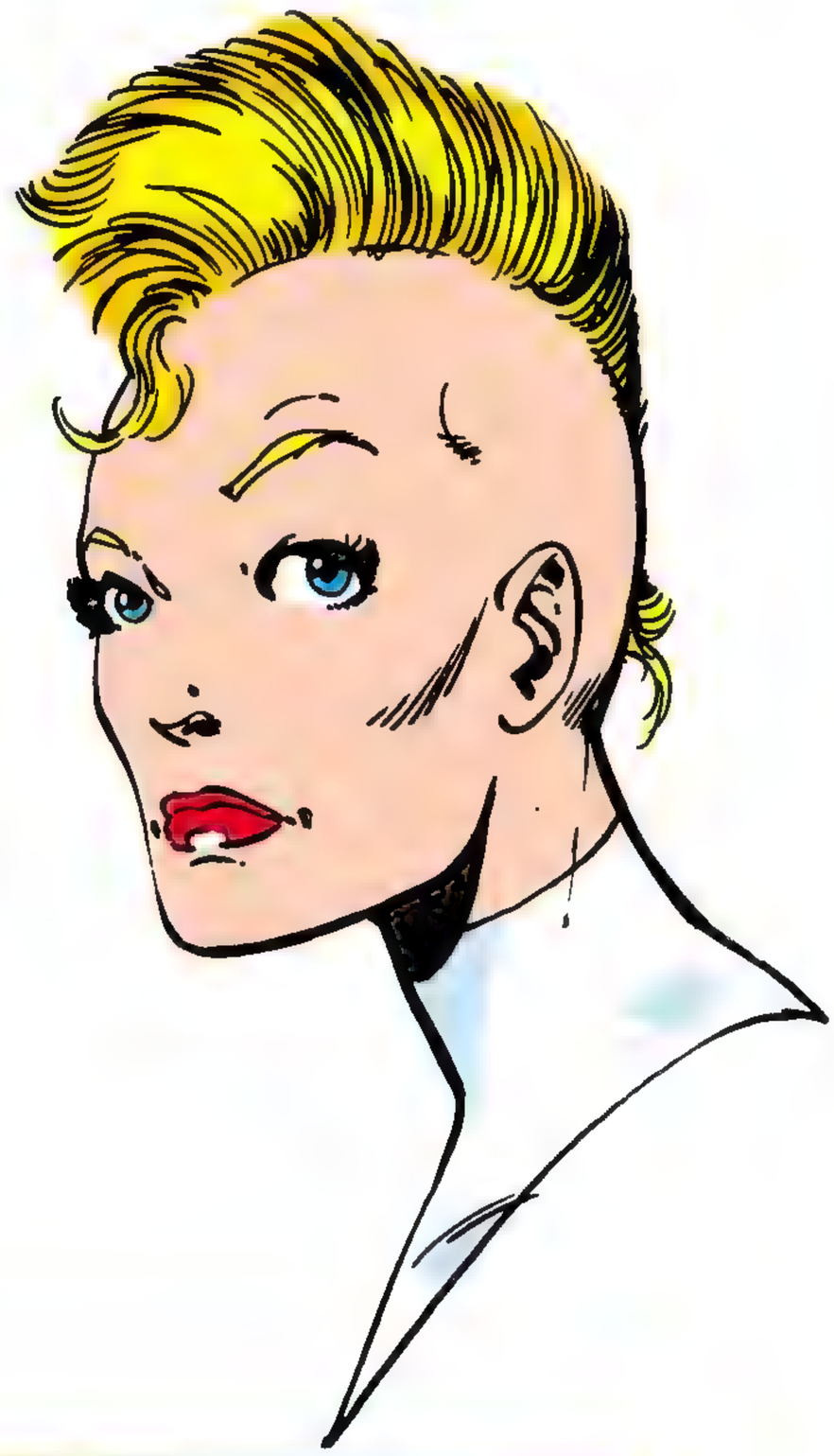
Scott McClung of Grand Junction, Colorado
Vincent Stone of Evansville, Indiana
Tom Mehs of Jamestown, New York
Frank Patrick Squillace of Phoenix, Arizona
Janet Taglianetti of Baldwin, New York
Tim Alvis of Exeter, Nevada
Kevin Crumble of London, England
Grant Sandground (No Address Given)
and last, but by no means least . . .
Larry A. Johnson of South Beloit, Illinois.

All of you turned in such beautifully rendered pieces that John was just about ready to hang up his pencils and look for honest work. Sorry none of your entries have actually won, but we hope this will soothe the pain of losing at least a little.

(In case you're wondering how we can have decided on anyone who *hasn't* won when we haven't yet decided on who *has*, we are considering entries on the basis of practicality, attractiveness, suitability for Sue and, *ahem*, how difficult they are to draw. Remember, you might send in a single sketch of a beautiful, elaborate hairstyle, but if that's the one Sue picked, poor John would have to draw it twenty-five or thirty times per issue.)

A second thing we thought you might find of interest is the numerical balance of the entries — that is, if this were strictly a quantity contest, as opposed to a quality contest, which style would be in the "lead". Below are the two "front-running styles" as rendered by John. We point out, again, that neither of these have won. We've just received more letters suggesting these two styles than any other.

By the way, this issue officially ENDS the contest, so send NO MORE ENTRIES as of the moment you read this!



AN EXPLANATION

As an editor for Marvel Comics, I find that sometimes my job demands my presence in places other than the Bullpen. This was the case this past August when I went to visit the San Diego Comic Convention. Upon my return, I quickly discovered what my assistant, Michael Higgins, had been up to in my absence: not only had he chosen to put himself in the most recent adventure of the Fantastic Four (recounted last issue), but he actually allowed John Byrne to go along with our heroes on their trip across the univsrse! True, John wanted to go — he always wants to tag along — but he's too valuable a talent to risk like that. Why, Marvel's insurance policy doesn't even cover intergalactic accidents! That's one of my responsibilities as editor — to keep John safely grounded and working. As for Higgins — the only way he'll ever get in the FF again is if he's bombarded by cosmic rays first!

— Bob Budiansky

September 1983 Marvel Bullpen Bulletins pinup
by John Byrne

...BULLPEN BULLETINS.....

Big Jim Shooter asked me to do a guest spot for the Bulletins Page, and for the longest time – like, *two* years – I couldn't come up with anything resembling a theme.

Then it hit me: why not talk about why I love Marvel so much. Then it hit me again! Why not *draw* about why I love Marvel so much.

What do I love most about being here at Marvel? It's the interesting people you get to work with...

Marvel Age #14 (May 1984) featured an interview with John Byrne, who also co-starred in the first installment of the title's ongoing Fred Hembeck cartoon column.

MARVEL AGE Talks to John Byrne

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by Mark Lerer

MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE has gotten more requests for an interview with **John Byrne** than any other Bullpen personality. Meet the talented and articulate writer / artist who chronicles the adventures of the **Fantastic Four** and **Alpha Flight**.

*What's a typical day like for **John Byrne**?*

The alarm clock goes off at 6:45 AM. I have breakfast. I'm at the drawing board by eight or eight thirty, and I work til about 11:30 or noon, when I break for lunch. I like to be back at work not too much later than noon, and then I work through until four o'clock, or until I have three pages done, whichever comes first. The whole thing begins again the next day when the alarm goes off at 6:45!

Where do you live?

I live in Brooklyn Heights with my wife **Andrea** and my step-daughter **Kate**. My house overlooks the promenade along the East River, so I have a beautiful view of the southern end of Manhattan. Whenever I need New York reference, it's right there for me!

We moved here recently from Evanston, Illinois, just outside Chicago. That's where I met my wife — at a comic convention, in fact! It was the July Chicago Comic Con of 1980. **Andrea**, who is an actress, had gotten tickets to the con from the stage manager of **Warp**, which was playing in Chicago at the time. It was her first experience with the world of comics, and it was pretty strange for

her! We got married in November of that year. Andy's acting career has been successful — many people don't know that Chicago, along with Los Angeles and New York, is one of the three major places where they shoot TV commercials. She was doing so well that we thought we'd try her luck out on the East Coast — and it was certainly no inconvenience for me to move even closer to the Marvel Bullpen — so here we are. **Andy**, **Kate**, and I are all very happy.

Where are you from originally?

I was born, thirty-three years ago, in England, in a town called West Bromwich, near Birmingham, in the midlands. I'm an only child, no brothers or sisters. I was raised there and in Canada, in towns called Edmonton and Calgary, in the western part of the continent — straight north of Denver.

How did you first get into comics?

My first experience with comics had to be when I was a kid in England. I remember the Superman TV show, which starred **George Reeves**, and seeing the **SUPERMAN** comic. After we moved to Canada, I found the rest of the **SUPERMAN** books. I remember reading the first **Supergirl** story, in fact.

Just before I turned twelve, in Edmonton, I found **FANTASTIC FOUR** #5. It blew me away. First of all, the artwork was like nothing I had ever seen. It was more exciting, more *alive* — not necessarily more realistic, but more *alive* — than other comics. Second, it was a full-length story — not three little eight-pagers! That bowled me over. And, to top it all off, the action took place in New York! I knew that there was no such place as Metropolis, but I knew that there was a New York — I had been there! The boat docked on the several trips we had made coming over from England! Think of it — a twelve year old kid living in the middle of nowhere reading about this fantastic adventure taking place in an actual city. It made me wonder if it could be real.

I waited a lifetime for **F.F.** #6 to come out! I was hooked. Of course, I soon discovered the rest of the Marvel line — but because my parents restricted how much money I could spend on comics, I couldn't collect all of them. The **AVENGERS** was a godsend — I couldn't afford to buy the **HULK**, **THOR**, and **IRON MAN** — and there they all were in one comic book! You know, years later, when I began to collect comics again, it took me a long time to start picking up the **HULK**, **THOR**, and **IRON MAN** — funny how that old preconditioning can stay with you.

When I was about fifteen, I stopped buying comics and got into other things. I rediscovered Marvel when I was twenty-two and started buying up all the back issues that I had missed. Hey, maybe you can make some sense out of this old "thirty-two" thing that's been following me around all my career — I stopped reading comics with **FANTASTIC FOUR** #32, I started again with **F.F.** #132, and the first issue that I wrote and drew was #232. Think it means anything?

How did you start writing and drawing?

Well, I started drawing when I was a very small child. I remember sitting on my grandfather's lap, drawing a picture of a horse on a chalkboard as he guided my hand. My parents still have that chalkboard drawing. It's the earliest known **John Byrne** original! I'm almost entirely self-taught as an artist, except for a while when I attended the Alberta College of Art in Calgary. I didn't really publish much "fan" art at all. Around 1975, I did do some drawings for a fanzine called **CPL**, which also helped launch the careers of **Roger Stern** and **Bob Layton**. But I went professional so soon after that — that very year, in fact — that I would call that my "non-pro" as opposed to my "fan" period. Within a few months, I was working for Charlton, and then I began drawing for Marvel.

But I really started out to be a writer! I was very involved with science fiction in high school, and during that time, at about age fifteen or sixteen, I wrote about fifteen novels and it must be over five hundred short stories. My parents' closet is still full of them! The good ones eventually got turned into comic book stories, by the way — for example, the **Galactus** story in **FANTASTIC FOUR** #262 is based on one of those old stories I wrote then.

I'm particularly a fan of **Isaac Asimov's** *Foundation* trilogy — which I insist is *still* a trilogy —

and his robot novels, such as *I, Robot*. *Lord of Light* by **Roger Zelazny**, and *Ringworld*, by **Larry Niven**, particularly influenced me. **Larry Niven** is a great guy, by the way, and a good friend of mine. He tells me he's a **John Byrne** fan, too!

What's your advice to beginning artists and writers?

First, learn to draw by looking at the world, not just at comics. Every professional will advise anyone who wants to enter the business to draw what's out in the world. If you can draw the world, we can teach you to draw super heroes.

As for writing — I learned the same important things from my favorite science fiction authors that I did from **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby's FANTASTIC FOUR**. Character is more important than cosmic. The people in the story, and their reactions, are more important than the colossal event. You've heard this all before, I'm sure, but it bears repeating — concentrate more on the "Man" than on the "Super."

For writers and artists who are entering the business right now, I'll share a rule of thumb I followed when I took over the **FANTASTIC FOUR**. Turn the clock back. Get back and see fresh what it was that made the book great at its inception. Find that, and translate it into 1980's concepts. Don't just tack the 1980's concepts on.

*Being the writer and artist for **THE FANTASTIC FOUR** is a coveted job. How do most people react when you tell them what you do for a living?*

I'll tell you, it usually takes a twenty-minute sermon to explain to people what I do, because most people don't know how comics are made — that they don't spring full blown from the brow of Zeus! I get tired of explaining — so when someone at a party asks me what I do for a living, I usually make some gag up! I'll tell them I'm a gynecologist or something. Eventually, though, if I'm getting to know someone, they'll wheedle it out of me that I'm a comic book artist. If they know **the Fantastic Four**, or if they've heard of Marvel, they're usually impressed. It's neat.

What's really fun is meeting friends and co-workers of my actress wife's. I'm really impressed when I meet actors and famous people. **Ron Parady** of *Hill Street Blues*, is a friend, and I've met more *brothers* and *sisters* of famous people than I can even recall! Sometimes these people know my work, and that's always fun and gratifying.

*How do you go about plotting **the F.F.**?*

I have the **FANTASTIC FOUR** roughly plotted out for about a year in advance. The same goes for **THE THING**, and I generally have **ALPHA FLIGHT** plotted out about six months or so in advance. I'm always kicking around the ideas in my head for how to go with the series, what directions the book will take, and what villains and new characters will appear. Before I begin writing each issue, I turn in a written plot and meet with the editor. **Bob Budiansky**, for the **F.F.** and **THING**, and **Denny O'Neil**, for **ALPHA FLIGHT**, help me fine tune the plot.

*What's in store for **the Fantastic Four**?*

They're going through a very difficult time right now. They'll suffer a terrible loss, the most traumatic tragedy of their careers. The repercussions are devastating, but the four deal with it realistically, and they do continue as a team.

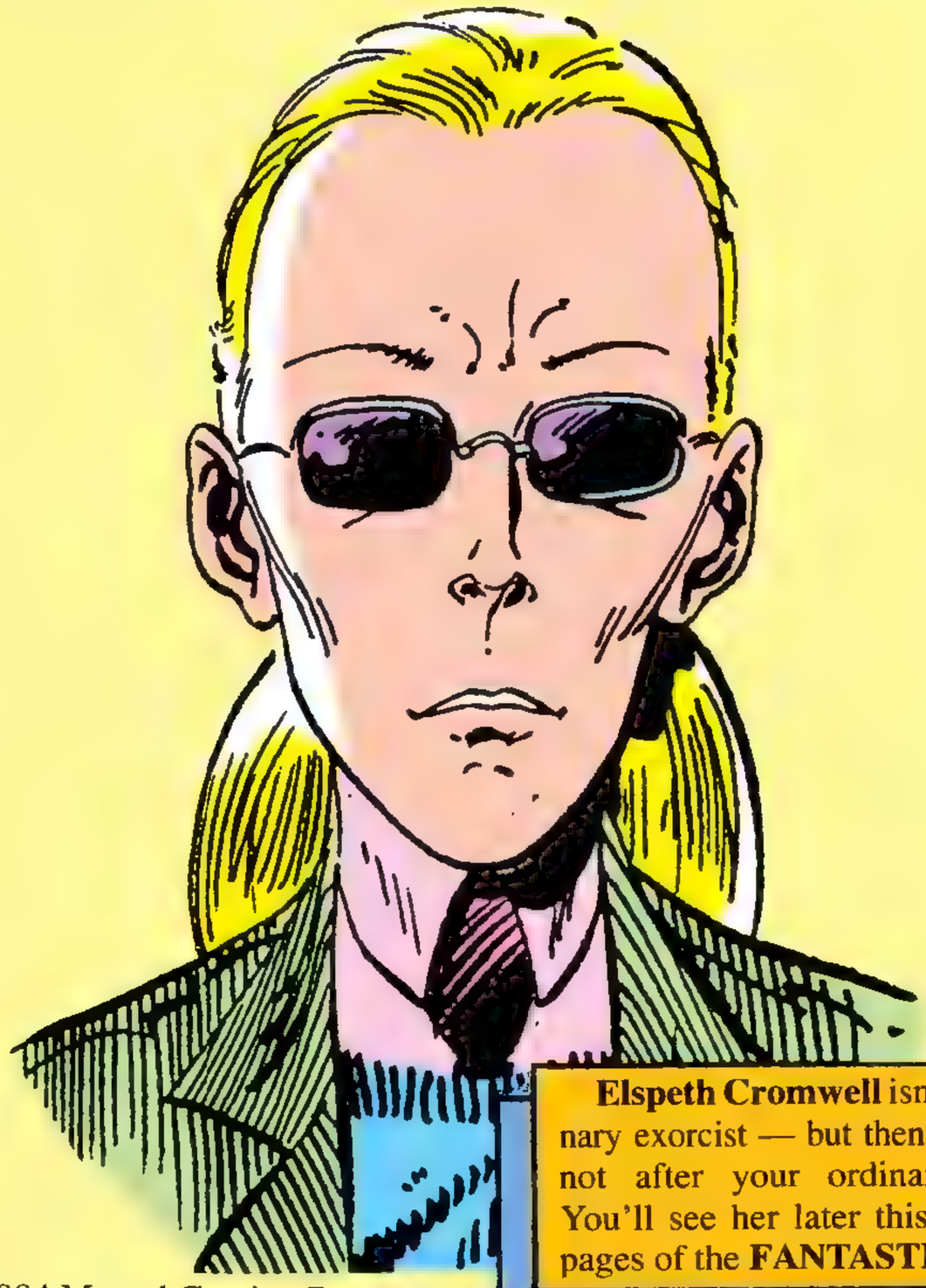
Their lives aren't going to get easier. The same week that they suffer this loss, **Terminus** arrives on Earth. He's really a cosmic sleazebag. **Galactus** may eat planets in order to survive, but Terminus has no such nobility. He pillages planets, selling the populations into slavery and stealing the planet's natural resources. He's just basically rotten and evil.

She-Hulk, as you know, is the newest member of the team, temporarily replacing **Ben**. All this hits her during her first week on the job, and the way she reacts to it all should reveal quite a bit about her. Speaking of revealing, **She-Hulk** will appear in a solo story in **F.F.** #276, when a helicopter pilot catches her sunbathing on top of the Baxter Building!

In the middle of all these events, also, **the Fantastic Four** have to contend with **Dr. Doom**!

*But **Dr. Doom** is dead!*

I know.



Elspeth Cromwell isn't your ordinary exorcist — but then again, she's not after your ordinary witches! You'll see her later this year in the pages of the **FANTASTIC FOUR**!

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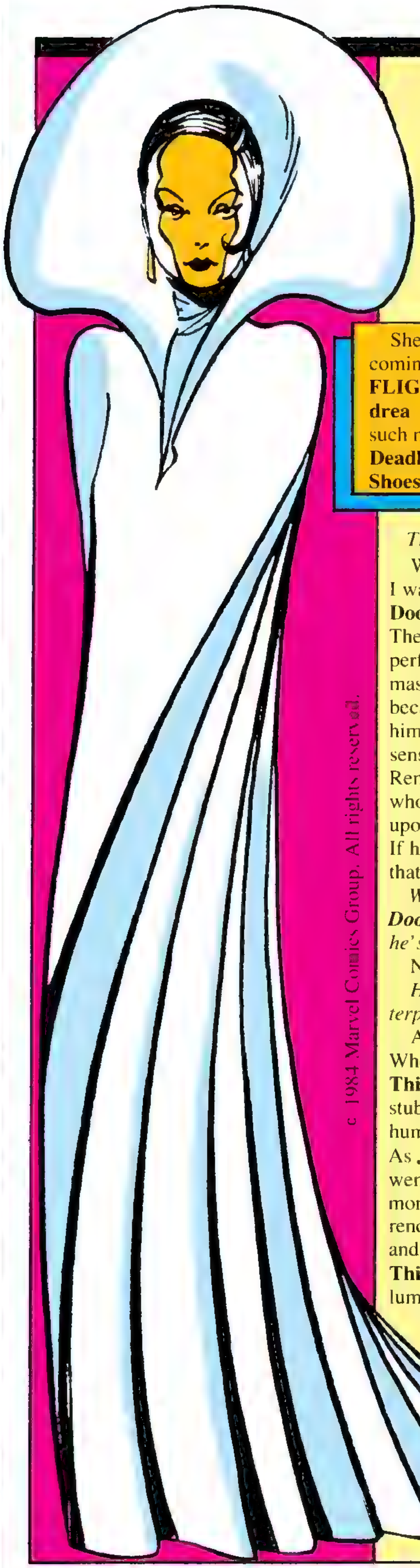

She's **Gilded Lily** — and she's coming up in the pages of **ALPHA FLIGHT**! **John's** lovely wife **Andrea** created her — as she created such memorable characters as **Puck**, **Deadly Ernest**, and **Goody Two-Shoes**!

*Then is it **Dr. Doom** or isn't it?*

Well, yes . . . and no. By the way, I want to clear up a rumor about **Dr. Doom's** face. His face is a mess. There was a rumor that he was a perfectly handsome man under the mask, except for one scar which, because of his tremendous ego, made him feel hideously disfigured. Nonsense. He *is* hideously disfigured. Remember, when the Tibetan monks who raised him first placed the mask upon his face, the metal was still hot! If his face wasn't misshapen before, that alone would do it.

*We still want to know if it's **Dr. Doom** or not, and how it can be if he's dead.*

Next question, please!

*How did you come up with your interpretation of **The Thing?***

Again, I turned the clock back. When **Ben Grimm** first became **the Thing**, his arms, legs, and head were stubby, and not proportioned like a human being's. He was a monster. As **Joe Sinnott** has said, as the years went by **Ben** gradually turned from a monster into teddy bear. Now my rendition of **the Thing** has him rocky and not lumpy, but I want the rocky **Thing** to work and move like the lumpy **Thing** did. His proportions are *not* human. He's really shaped more like a starfish than a human being, and he doesn't move or function as he would were he human.

This is why **Ben** is so miserable as **the Thing**. I got a fan letter recently from a reader who wanted to know why **Ben** was unhappy being **The Thing**, who concluded "You think that he'd like it by now!" Well, he *doesn't* like it. He's a lot like **the Elephant Man** in this respect, and that's why he had the particular reaction that he did when he saw *The Elephant Man*, in issue #232.

*Talk about the other members of **the FF — Reed, Sue**, and **Johnny**.*

Johnny hasn't grown up at all. He's still the hot-headed immature adolescent he's always been. Wait'll you see how he reacts to having **the She-Hulk** in the group.

Reed Richards would probably be a small town college professor if it hadn't been for the accident that made him into **Mister Fantastic**. Contrary to popular belief, **Reed** is not perfect. There are some quirks in his personality than I want to reveal as I delve into his past in the coming months. What was he like in college? What was his childhood like? We really don't know!

Think. **Reed Richards**, the most steadfast and cautious man you can imagine, the guy who double-checks every instrument fifty times before he embarks on anything — this guy once got in an untested rocket ship, *knowing full well that it had insufficient shielding*, with his fiancee and a sixteen year old kid? There's more to **Reed** than we know about. That's all I'll say for now.

Sue Richards has been unintentionally pushed to the sidelines a lot in her career. I want it to be clear that **Sue** has a memory and an imagination. She may not be the strategic genius **Reed** is, but she's contributed her share of moves to the group's fighting style, and she's remembered them, and learned a great deal quickly and well. She's a bright lady.

Basically, **Sue** is a mother, not an adventuress. Being a mother is a full-time job. She's a beautiful woman, and if I had to describe it, I'd say she has more of a radiant beauty than the glamorous beauty that **Dazzler** has, or the kind of whimsical charm the **Wasp** has. I think of **Sue** as the mother of the Marvel Universe, and, of course, everyone's mother is the most beautiful woman in the world.

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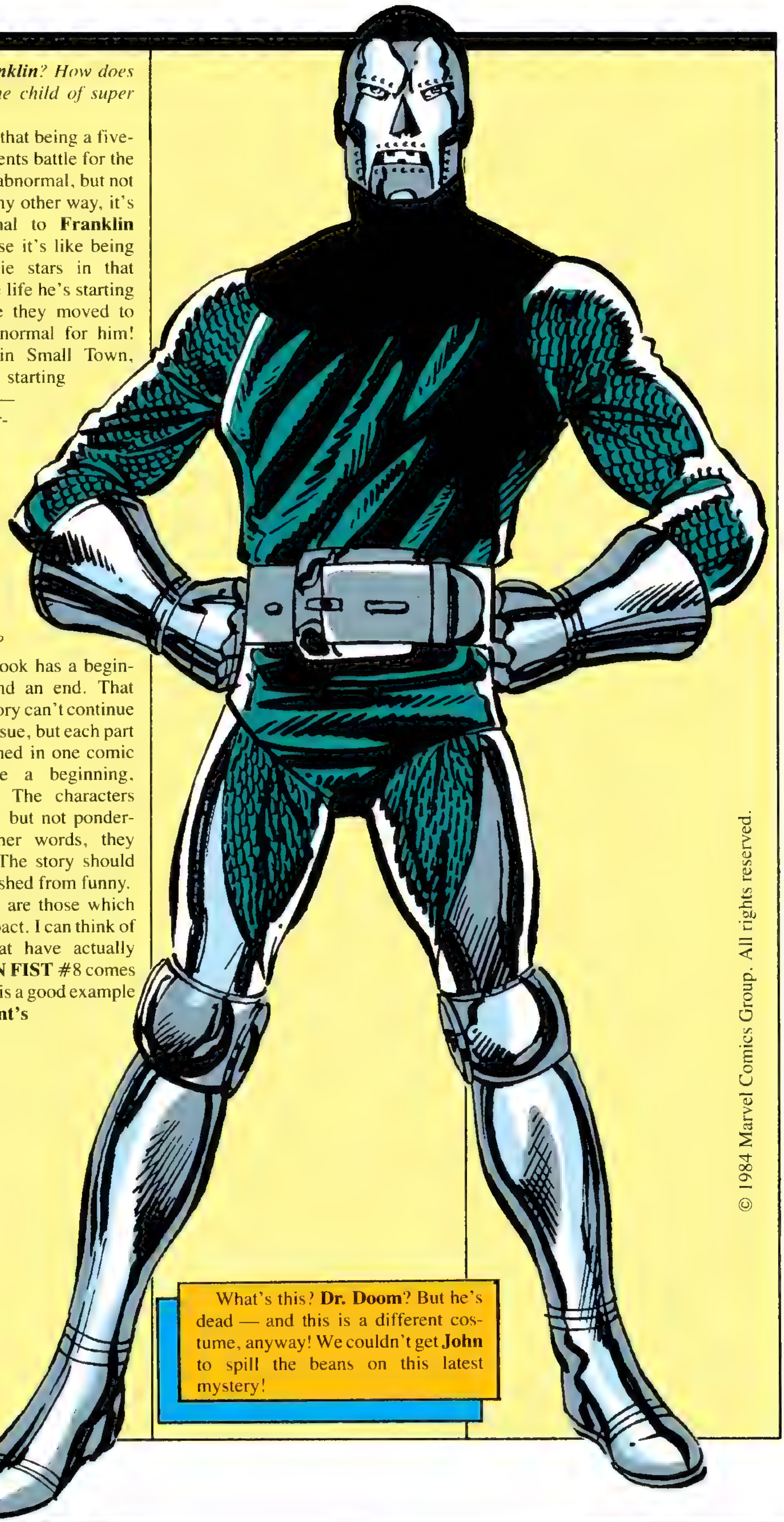
*What about **Franklin**? How does he handle being the child of super heroes?*

You might think that being a five-year-old whose parents battle for the survival of earth is abnormal, but not having grown up any other way, it's all perfectly normal to **Franklin Richards**. I suppose it's like being the child of movie stars in that respect. In fact, the life he's starting to lead *now*, since they moved to Connecticut, is abnormal for him! Now he's living in Small Town, U.S.A.! He'll be starting kindergarten soon — that should be interesting.

What makes a good comic book?

A good comic book has a beginning, a middle, and an end. That doesn't mean the story can't continue for more than one issue, but each part of the story contained in one comic book should have a beginning, middle, and end. The characters should be realistic, but not ponderously so — in other words, they shouldn't preach. The story should be fun, as distinguished from funny.

The best comics are those which have emotional impact. I can think of a few offhand that have actually made me cry. **IRON FIST** #8 comes to mind. That story is a good example of **Chris Claremont's** writing at its



What's this? **Dr. Doom**? But he's dead — and this is a different costume, anyway! We couldn't get **John** to spill the beans on this latest mystery!

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best. It brought a tear to my eye even though I saw the story in advance and drew it! The stories starring **Darrell The Clown**, back in **MAN-THING**, written by **Steve Gerber** and drawn by **Mike Ploog** touched me. **Len Wein** wrote a beautiful **HULK** story a few years back, in which **The Hulk** befriended a little blind girl. "The Kid Who Collected Spider-Man" also had an impact on me. A really good comic can make me laugh, too, but it's harder to think of examples of that offhand.

*Are you competing with what **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** did when they wrote and drew **THE FANTASTIC FOUR**?*

Oh, no. I couldn't compete with **Stan** and **Jack**. I'm not the writer **Stan** is nor the artist **Jack** is. Being one person both writing and drawing the strip means that I have a potential for a better synthesis of art and story, perhaps. But I don't think I could ever create **Galactus**, **the Black Panther**, or **the Inhumans**. And those guys created **Galactus**, **the Black Panther**, and **the Inhumans** all within six issues of each other!

I hope to be a worthy heir to **Stan** and **Jack**. **THE FANTASTIC FOUR** is the second highest selling Marvel title today. But by all accounts, it should be number one, and I intend to make it that way! It is, after all, "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine!"

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Who is **Terminus**? From looking at his picture, you might think he's the vilest creature to stumble upon the planet Earth in a long time! And you know something? You'd be right!

HI THERE, EVERYONE! I'M YOUR HOST, FRED HEMBECK, AND I'D LIKE TO WELCOME YOU TO A BRAND NEW REGULAR FEATURE IN THIS MAGAZINE--

HEMBECK'S PAGE IN MARVEL AGE!

IT'S ALL THE RAGE!

WITH ME TODAY IS MARVEL'S FIRST AND FOREMOST SUPER TEAM--THE FANTASTIC FOUR! HOWDY FOLKS!

HELLO, FRED.

HIYA!

H'LO...

PLEASED TO MEET YOU.

GEE, I'M OVER-WHELMED--THERE'S JUST **SO** MUCH TO ASK! WHERE DO I START?..

AHA! I'VE GOT IT!

YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT MY TRE-MENDOUS I.Q., DON'T YOU? WELL,--

NO, NO, THAT'S NOT IT.

OH, THEN I SUPPOSE YOU WANT TO KNOW JUST HOW HOT I CAN GET. Y'SEE, IT DEPENDS--

UH UH. THAT'S NOT IT EITHER.

SO IT'S MY BRUTE STRENGTH THAT IMPRESSES YOU, eh? YOU WANNA KNOW WHO'S STRONGER, ME OR THE HULK, RIGHT?

WRONG.

WELL, I **KNOW** IT'S NOT ME YOU'RE INTER-ESTED IN, SO JUST WHAT IS YOUR QUESTION?

YEAH, WHAT'S YOUR QUESTION?

YES, WHAT IS IT?

WHAT'S JOHN BYRNE **REALLY** LIKE?..

OWW!!..

OF ALL THE NERVE!

...IT'S FRED HEMBECK?!?

FRED ARE YOU ALRIGHT?

JOHN BYRNE --JUST THE MAN I WANTED TO SEE. YEAH, I'M OKAY, BUT I **DO** HAVE A QUESTION FOR YOU...

OH? I SUPPOSE YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT MY PLANS ARE FOR THE F.F.? WELL, TO BEGIN WITH--

NO, THAT'S NOT IT.

THEN YOU MUST WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S COMING UP FOR ALPHA FLIGHT?..

UH UH.

WELL, WHAT **DO** YOU WANT TO KNOW?

JUST WHY **DID** YOU LEAVE THE X-MEN, JOHN?

JOHN?...

I **SWORE** I'D **KILL** THE NEXT PERSON WHO ASKED ME THAT!

KILL!.. KILL!.. KILL!..

TH--THAT'S--**AGGK**-ALL FOR NOW GANG...**GGHHK**.. B-BE SEEING YOU...**URK**.. NEXT...MONTH! B-BYE...

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Fred Hembeck © 1984 by Fred Hembeck. All rights reserved.

John Byrne revised his 1982 *Fantastic Four Chronicles* pinup for release as *Marvel Press Poster* #3 – *Fantastic Four* (1984). He updated the FF's costumes, added Attuma (next to the Mad Thinker) and the scientist from *FF* #51 (beneath Annihilus) and changed the Puppet Master's marionette from Fred Hembeck to John Byrne.

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The Fantastic Four #258 cover original art
by John Byrne

Courtesy Philippe Queveau

The Fantastic Four #258 page 1 original art
by John Byrne

FANTASTIC FOUR #258

STAN LEE PRESENTS PERHAPS THE STRANGEST ISSUE EVER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

INTERLUDE

THE TIME IS SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. IN **NEW YORK** THE MEMBERS OF THE **FANTASTIC FOUR** ARE RE-COUPERATING FROM AN ALL-OUT BATTLE WITH THE SHAPE-SHIFTING **SKRULLS** AND AN ALIEN SUPER-SOLDIER KNOWN AS **GLADIATOR.**

BUT THIS IS NOT NEW YORK, AND THIS SOMBER, BROODING FIGURE IS NOT ONE OF THE FF. HE IS, IN FACT, THEIR GREATEST ENEMY, A MAN OF VAST KNOWLEDGE AND AWESOME POWER.

HE IS **DOCTOR DOOM!**

TO PHILIPPE
THANKS!

OOO IT IS GOOD.

FANTASTIC FOUR® Vol. 1, No. 258, September, 1983. (ISSN 0274-5291) Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Galton, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Michael Hobson, Vice-President, Publishing. Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. Second Class postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing office. Published monthly. Copyright ©1983 by Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Price 60¢ per copy in the U.S. and 75¢ Canada. Subscription rate $7.20 for 12 issues. Canada and Foreign, $9.20. Printed in the U.S A No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition FANTASTIC FOUR (including all prominent characters featured in the issue), and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of the MARVEL COMICS GROUP. Postmaster: Send address changes to Subscription Dept., Marvel Comics Group, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10016.

Courtesy Philippe Queveau

The Fantastic Four #261 page 9 original art
by John Byrne

MINUTES LATER, SPECIAL BAFFLES DAMPEN THE ROAR OF ROCKET ENGINES AS A UNIQUE SPACECRAFT LEAPS FROM ITS SILO ATOP THE BAXTER BUILDING.

ZERO PLUS TWENTY-EIGHT SECONDS, ALL SYSTEMS NOMINAL.

BEN, STAND BY TO ACTIVATE SECONDARY THRUSTERS.

WAY AHEAD OF YA, SUZIE. OUT OF ATMOSPHERE IN TWELVE SECONDS...

...AN' INTA THE *COSMIC RAY BELT* AGAIN...

UNBIDDEN, THE MIND OF **BEN GRIMM** TURNS BACK, TO ANOTHER ROCKET, ANOTHER LAUNCH...

PRIMARY CIRCUITS AT MAXIMUM FUNCTION. ALL SYSTEMS SHOW GREEN FOR FIRST STAGE JETTISON.

SHE'S BEHAVING LIKE A BABY. EVERY-THING IS PERFECT.

YEAH, EXCEPT FOR THE COSMIC RAYS. NO ONE KNOWS WHAT THEY'LL DO.

FOUR PEOPLE, FOUR FRIENDS, EMBARKING ON A BOLD VENTURE INTO THE UNKNOWN, REACHING FOR THE STARS, GUESSING NOT AT ALL WHAT FATE TRULY HELD IN STORE FOR THEM...

WE'RE ENTERING THE COSMIC STORM AREA! HANG ON!

HEAR THAT? IT'S THE COSMIC RAYS! THEY'RE *PENETRATING* THE SHIP!

9.

Courtesy Scott Dunbier

The Fantastic Four #261 page 10 original art
by John Byrne

FANTASTIC FOUR #261
11
AND AS THE UBIQUITOUS RAYS PIERCE THE HULL PLATES...
MY HEAD... POUNDING AS THOUGH IT'S ABOUT TO BURST!
BEN WAS RIGHT. WE SHOULD HAVE WAITED.
SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN HEAVIER SHIELDING...
JOHNNY...WHAT'S HAPPENING TO YOU?
I DON'T KNOW, SUE!
MY BODY FEELS HOT--LIKE I'M ON FIRE!
SOMEONE ELSE TAKE THE CONTROLS. MY ARMS ARE TOO HEAVY...
TOO HEAVY. GOTTA LIE DOWN...
CAN'T MOVE...
BEN!
ONLY THE SHIP'S SOPHISTICATED AUTOPILOT PREVENTS ULTIMATE TRAGEDY.
THE GLORIOUS MISSION TO THE STARS ENDS IGNOMINIOUSLY IN A WOODED AREA NORTH OF ITHACA, NEW YORK.
BUT THE TALE DOES NOT END THERE.
EXPOSED TO A POTENTIALLY LETHAL DOSE OF RADIATION, THE FOUR ADVENTURERS FIND THEMSELVES NOT DYING, BUT TRANSFORMED!
THEY HAVE BECOME...
MISTER FANTASTIC!
THE THING!
THE INVISIBLE GIRL!
THE HUMAN TORCH!
10

Courtesy Scott Dunbier

Fantastic Four: The Trial of Galactus TPB (1989) cover
by John Byrne

Reprinting material from *The Fantastic Four* #242-244, #257-262 and *What The--?!* #2

INTRODUCTION
BY JOHN BYRNE
FROM FANTASTIC FOUR: THE TRIAL OF GALACTUS TPB (1989)

In 1966 Stan Lee and Jack Kirby created a character like none who had ever appeared before in the annals of comic book fantasy.

Not that Stan and Jack had exactly been *dozing* before that. In the previous five years they had combined their talents to completely redefine what American comic books were all about. They had created, in stunning short order, the Fantastic Four, the Incredible Hulk, the Mighty Thor, Iron Man, Ant-Man, and, in short, a whole *universe* of new and amazing characters.

They also created themselves a slight problem; when every issue has to be bigger, better, more spectacular than the last, how do you keep outdoing yourself, month after month? Especially when your latest effort was nothing less than the creation of an entire, hidden *race* of super-powered beings (the mysterious Inhumans).

Well, legend has it that Stan's instructions to Jack as to what to do next were astonishingly simple and to the point. Supposedly he sent Jack a "plot" which consisted of nothing more or less than *four words*: "Have them fight God."

And so, on a rooftop above Manhattan, we first met *Galactus!*

Then, in 1980, it became my delightful task to chronicle the adventures of the Fantastic Four, and one of the first things I wanted to do was a Galactus story of my very own. The challenge handed me by the editorial level at Marvel, however, was not slight; restore Galactus to his former glories. Expunge the pettiness that had wheedled its way into later portrayals of the character. Reestablish the being Stan and Jack had first presented us, fourteen years earlier.

It took quite a while to do it. From early 1982 through the middle of 1984, I worked with several different editors, all of whom receive their due credit elsewhere, in putting together this "Purpose of Galactus" story. Many other adventures wound around the pages that follow, as the FF went through their busy lives, battling evils and generally representing the Right Stuff in the Marvel Universe.

To the best of our ability those other tales have been edited out of the single, cohesive representation "of my" Galactus story which you are about to read. Here and there you will find references to some of those stories; places like the Negative Zone get a passing mention, and one character at least makes reference to an FF adventure in which she was involved but about which you will here learn, alas, nothing.

The Thing you *will* notice, however, goes through a rather dramatical physical change about halfway through this book. In a storyline begun quite early in my tenure on the FF's title I'd caused Ben Grimm to "regress" to an earlier version of his monstrous form, one whose skin looked less like a dry riverbed and more like dinosaur hide. Subsequently he was changed back to his more traditional "rocky" form, but that sequence is missing here, since it did not involve Galactus, or any of his heralds.

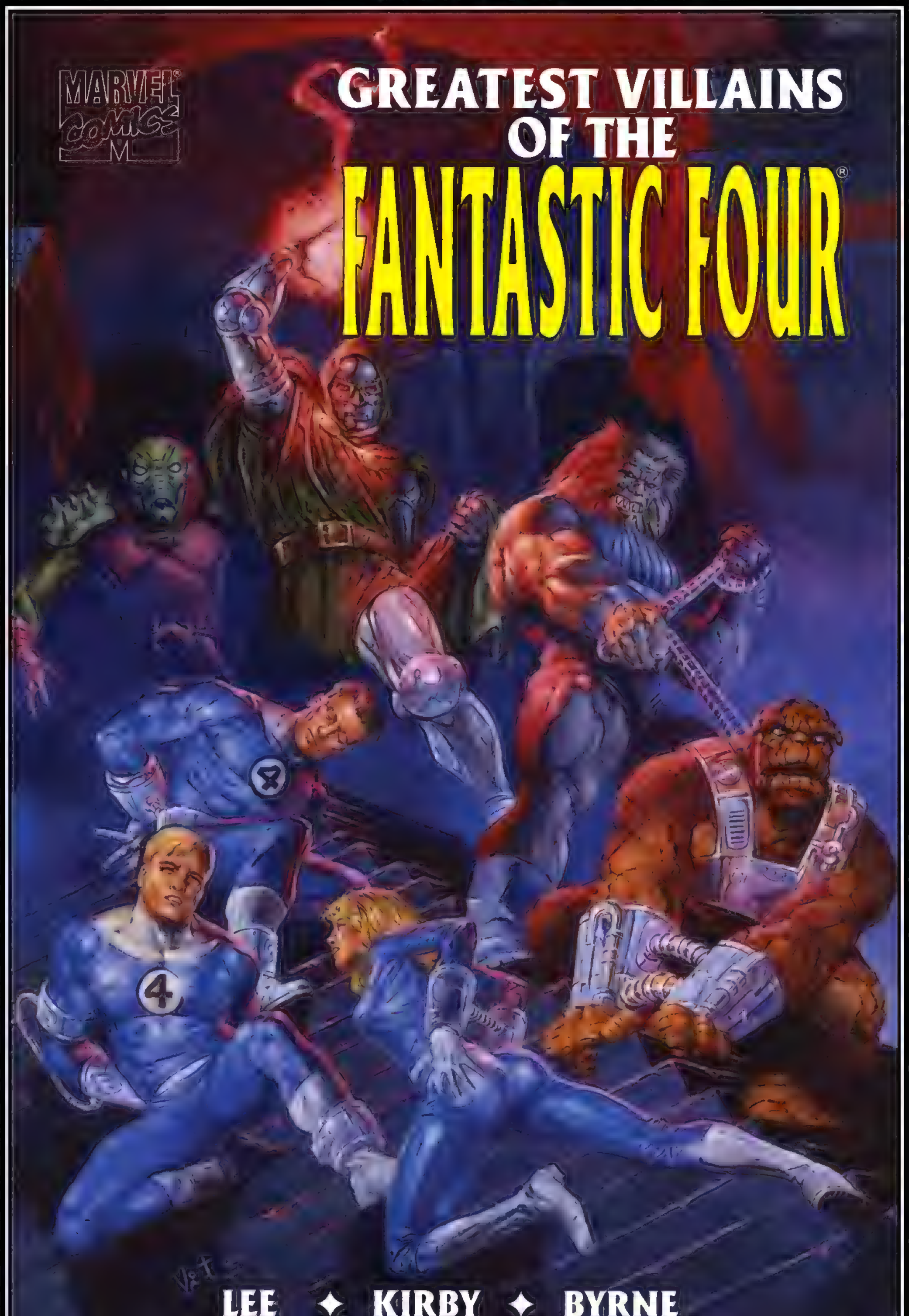
Then, too, the FF's costumes change from blue and black to black and white. This also came out of a story not represented in this volume (although it *is* hinted at; it was in that particular tale that the Vision was injured, and that injury is mentioned here).

All in all, though, an amazing degree of so-called "Marvel Serendipity" seems to have been working on my side as I shifted and deleted pages to put this multi-issue saga into one hopefully digestible lump. Whole sequences dropped away, and yet the events which bracketed them often fit together so seamlessly no rewriting was necessary. Where rewriting *was* done, the original mood and intent has been scrupulously maintained.

So…enjoy.

– John Byrne
1989

Greatest Villains of the Fantastic Four TPB (1995) cover
by Vince Evans



Reprinting *The Fantastic Four* #100, #258-260, #289-290 & *Annual* #5

INTRODUCTION
BY RICHARD ASHFORD
FROM GREATEST VILLAINS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR TPB (1995)

Super heroes. They're strong, powerful, determined and usually triumphant. No doubt about that. But have we ever stopped to wonder what makes these heroes what they are? What is that magic ingredient that separates these individuals—these heroes—from the rest of humanity? In essence: What is it that makes a hero great?

To answer this question, one would first have to conduct a thorough examination upon some of society's classic heroes—Sherlock Holmes, King Arthur, Luke Skywalker, etc. And after such a review, after endless research and investigation, even the most experienced of inquisitors would most likely discover the one, true answer. What makes heroes great is their overcoming the opposition. In short, what makes heroes great are their villains.

Take a moment and think about it. A hero could never be a hero without a nearly equally powerful villain to fight. It's as simple as that. Where would the great Sherlock Holmes be without the equally sinister Moriarty? Or the brave King Arthur without Morgan Le Fey and their diabolical son, Modred? Or just try and imagine Luke Skywalker and the Rebellion without the powerful dark force of Darth Vader and the Empire opposing them? Go ahead, try. After a while, you're sure to come to the one and only conclusion: that one can't be a really great hero without having some pretty impressive villains to make the heroes look great.

Take the Fantastic Four, for instance. As incomparable and wonderful as these Marvel heroes are, they would seem mundane or boring without some truly great villains continually testing them. And even in the ever-expanding realm of the Marvel Universe, really outstanding villains are not as common as you might think. Only one or two great ones appear every so often. Great ones like Doctor Doom. Which begs the question, where would the Fantastic Four be without a great villain like Doom?

Before the FF first fought Doctor Doom in *The Fantastic Four* #5 they had already encountered the Mole Man, the Skrulls and the Sub-Mariner—none of them small players. Yet Doctor Doom managed to overshadow them all. His unique costume—fearsome and mysterious. His schemes for revenge on the Fantastic Four—devious and twisted. His genius—a dark counterpart to Reed's humanitarian scientific spirit. These elements combined to create a feeling that each subsequent conflict could have gone either way, if not for some caprice of fate, some tiny miscalculation, or Doom's arrogance in underestimating his foes.

Right from the start Doom was hot and it was no surprise that he returned the next issue and soon become the FF's archenemy. Great villains are not two-dimensional blanks; they live, they breathe, they have an existence separate from that which gave them birth. Doctor Doom has gone on to be one of the most feared and respected characters in all of the Marvel Universe; he has opposed more different heroes than any other villains.

But in this volume, Doom is only the proverbial tip of the iceberg. We have more in the way of bad guys—Blastaar and Annihilus, the devious duo from the Negative Zone; the forever manipulative Psycho Man; and the diabolically minded combo of the Mad Thinker and the Puppet Master. Each of them masters of malevolence in their own right. Each with their own dark reason to hate the Fantastic Four. Each of them holding the potential to forever wipe away the fabulous foursome. Each of them…great villains.

– Richard Ashford
1995

Fantastic Four Visionaries: John Byrne Vol. 4 TPB (2005) cover
by John Byrne & Chris Sotomayor

Reprinting *The Fantastic Four* #258-267, *Alpha Flight* #4 and *The Thing* #10

BIOGRAPHIES

JOHN BYRNE

With his naturalistic style captivating legions of fans, John Byrne became one of the most influential and popular comic artists of the '70s and '80s. Born in England but raised in Canada, with four years of art school training under his belt, Byrne headed straight for the comics business, getting his start with Charlton Comics.

He produced his first original creations, the robot Rog-2000—which appeared as a backup strip in *E-Man*—and *Doomsday +1* at Charlton. Though the art was rough compared to his later standards, it drew the attention of Marvel Comics, where he found work on *Champions*, *Iron Fist* and *Marvel Team-Up*. The relationship he established on these books with writer Chris Claremont led to his entry on a title that was rapidly ascending in importance at Marvel: the "All-New, All-Different" *X-Men*.

Taking the torch from Dave Cockrum, for the next five years Byrne penciled and co-plotted the adventures of Marvel's mutants. His fresh style translated perfectly to the new cast of characters, and together Byrne and Claremont built the X-Men into a keystone title at Marvel. However, just after the twin triumphs of "The Dark Phoenix Saga" and "Days of Future Past," Byrne left the book.

His next major achievement was a long run as writer/artist on *Fantastic Four* that restored the title to its imaginative best. His run hearkened back to the glory days of Lee and Kirby and is arguably the milestone achievement of his career. Other high points in his early '80s Marvel work included "War and Remembrance," a bracing set of Captain America stories with Roger Stern and *Alpha Flight*, a team of Canadian heroes written and drawn by Byrne.

Next, Byrne headed to DC Comics to revive the flagging Superman franchise with a reset of the Superman mythos that was enormously popular at the time and is still hailed as a masterpiece decades later. After two years helming Superman, Byrne returned to Marvel to work on a diverse set of books including the New Universe's *Star Brand*, the irreverent *Sensational She-Hulk* and the high-tech adventures of Iron Man. In the 1990s, Byrne launched his creator-owned series *Next Men*, scripted the first issues of Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* and delivered the goods for both Marvel and DC on numerous titles. Today, the implacable Byrne continues to write, draw and preside over a popular website. He was inducted into the Eisner Hall of Fame in 2015.

KERRY GAMMILL

Kerry Gammill's childhood interest in comics was kindled by Silver Age Marvel and a love of classic monsters from magazines like *Creepy* and *Eerie*. Gammill's first professional work was September 1978's *Marvel Team-Up* #73. After text piece illustrations in *Savage Sword of Conan*, he got his first ongoing gig eighteen months later on *Power Man & Iron Fist*, which he penciled for nearly two years. When he returned to *Marvel Team-Up* it was as the book's regular artist, where he penciled the adventures of Spider-Man and characters like Beast, Captain America, Vision and the Human Torch. In the mid-'80s, Gammill drew *Star Wars*, *The Further Adventures of Indiana Jones*, and entries in *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*. After drawing a 1986 *Wonder Man* one-shot, he dabbled in the X-Universe with the limited series *Fallen Angels* and an issue of *Uncanny X-Men*. By the end of the '80s, Gammill moved his talents to DC, where he drew *Superman* and *Action Comics*, both series scribed by Roger Stern. After a brief return to Marvel, where he drew the first two issues of *Deadly Foes of Spider-Man*, Gammill reduced his comics work to cover art as he established himself in advertising and as a conceptual and storyboard artist in movies and TV. In 2010, he returned to comics to indulge his love of monsters in *Bela Lugosi's Tales From the Grave* for his creator-owned Monsterverse imprint.

RON WILSON

Brooklyn-born Ron Wilson took his comic art aspirations to Marvel as an 18-year-old and was told by veteran Frank Giacoia that his talent level was "six months away" from getting him work. In 1973, as freshman at the Brooklyn Technical College of Art, Wilson submitted new samples and was hired to draw stories in Marvel's horror comics. Soon, Wilson turned out quick and quality work on covers, learning the ropes beside the production staff and legends such as John Buscema. Stories in *Power Man*, *Giant-Size Man-Thing* and *Master of Kung Fu* led to the title—and character—he would be most associated with for the rest of his career: the Thing's *Marvel Two-In-One*. He drew most of the next thirty issues of the title, took a respite to draw the black-and-white *The Hulk!* magazine, and then returned to *Marvel Two-In-One* in the latter part of 1980 to draw most of the rest of its 100-issue run. Once the team-up concept for the Thing drew to a close, Wilson was given the launch of a new *Thing* solo series written by John Byrne; he would draw the first 33 issues of the title. Other credits of the late '80s include the *Wolfpack* mini-series and graphic novel written by Larry Hama, the Star Comics adaptation of *Masters of the Universe*, and *Super Boxers*, Wilson's creator-owned graphic novel collaboration with Byrne. In the 1990s, Wilson left monthly comic book illustration but he continues to work today as a commission artist.

BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH

A brash newcomer to the American comics scene in the late '60s, London-born Barry Windsor-Smith rose from drawing his first American comics work on a New York City park bench to become one of the medium's most influential artists, driving his passion for pre-Raphaelite naturalism and Art Nouveau design into mainstream comics.

Influenced from an early age by artists like Jack Kirby and Gil Kane, Windsor-Smith made it a goal to one day work for Marvel Comics. His first professional forays produced artwork for *X-Men*, *Daredevil* and *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, all of which revealed a young man ardently working to define his own voice while mastering the lessons of his artistic forebears.

He first stepped out in a big way on *Conan the Barbarian,* Marvel's adaptation of Robert E. Howard's sword and sorcery character. It was here that Windsor-Smith developed a stunningly fresh approach to comic-art draftsmanship, holding on to Kirby's dynamic energy but pouring an increasing amount of time into detailed, lyrical figure drawing. As his skills developed, it became clear that Windsor-Smith's work on *Conan* was a clarion call for comic artists who wanted to take a more refined approach to their illustration.

In addition to making Conan into a bona fide hit, Windsor-Smith also turned in memorable work on *Avengers*, Doctor Strange in *Marvel Premiere* and Ka-Zar in *Astonishing Tales*, after which he started Gorblimey Press, his own studio that produced original prints and stories entirely of his own making, a concern that is still ongoing today.

A return to Marvel in 1984 produced a handful of projects that made a huge impression: a Machine Man limited series; the groundbreaking excursion into Wolverine's origin, "Weapon X"; "Lifedeath," a pair of timeless Storm stories told in *The Uncanny X-Men* and a myriad of classic covers.

In the 1990s, Windsor-Smith took on the role of creative director for Valiant Comics, an upstart company formed by former Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter. The Valiant line, including Windsor-Smith's *Archer and Armstrong*, *Solar: Man of the Atom* and *Unity*, was a big hit in part to Windsor-Smith's masterful work. He also created Malibu Comics' *Rune*, Dark Horse's *BWS: Storyteller* anthology and began his series of autobiographical art books, *Opus*. Winsor-Smith's decades-in-the making graphic novel *Monsters* was published in 2021. His accomplishments within the field were recognized by the Eisner Hall of Fame in 2008.

Biographies researched and written by John Rhett Thomas

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THE GOLDEN AGE

As the Great Depression wore on and the specter of war hung over America, a new storytelling medium was born: the comic book. Within their four-color pages, larger-than-life super heroes could make short work of America's foes, giving readers of all ages hope for victory against the real-life enemies that faced the United States. At the forefront of this new medium was Timely Comics, a young company staffed by such legendary creators as Carl Burgos, Bill Everett, Joe Simon, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee.

GOLDEN AGE ALL-WINNERS VOLS. 1-4
GOLDEN AGE CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-6
GOLDEN AGE DARING MYSTERY VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE MARVEL COMICS VOLS. 1-7
GOLDEN AGE MYSTIC COMICS VOL. 1
GOLDEN AGE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE U.S.A. COMICS VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE YOUNG ALLIES VOLS. 1-2

THE ATLAS ERA

Seeing super heroes waning, Timely Comics evolved into Atlas Comics and took on a vast new range of genres: science-fiction tales of outer space adventures; realistic war comics; buxom jungle heroines; horror comics that would become the center of a moral panic that rocked the industry; and romance comics for the emerging teen audience. Even the classic costumed heroes of the Golden Age retooled to take on the threat of Communism. From Western gunfighters to crime to horror, the Atlas Era had it all!

ATLAS ERA BATTLEFIELD VOL. 1
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ATLAS ERA STRANGE TALES VOLS. 1-6
ATLAS ERA TALES TO ASTONISH VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA TALES OF SUSPENSE VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA VENUS VOL. 1

THE MARVEL AGE

In August 1961, change hit newsstands: *The Fantastic Four* #1 did not feature the squeaky-clean heroes of yesteryear. They were real characters placed in extraordinary circumstances. They lived together, they fought among themselves — and sometimes, they even lost to the bad guys. This was more than a change in attitude: It was the beginning of something entirely different — the beginning of the Marvel Age of Comics!

Thanks to the fertile imaginations of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and others, an unending list of heroes followed the FF with ever-increasing acclaim and popularity: the Amazing Spider-Man, the Mighty Thor, the Incredible Hulk, Daredevil, Iron Man and the X-Men, to name but a few. These were the Marvel heroes, born of conflict and a continuous struggle to balance human lives with superhuman responsibilities.

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN VOLS. 1-23
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THE AVENGERS VOLS. 1-22
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CAPTAIN MARVEL VOLS. 1-6
THE CHAMPIONS VOL. 1
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THE DEFENDERS VOLS. 1-8
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THE FANTASTIC FOUR VOLS. 1-24
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THE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-2
THE INCREDIBLE HULK VOLS. 1-16
THE INHUMANS VOLS. 1-2
THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN VOLS. 1-14
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MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE VOLS. 1-6
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